

**'Is Younger Better?'**  
**A Critical Examination of the Beliefs about Learning a Foreign Language**  
**at Primary School**  
**PhD**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis is concerned with the learning of a foreign language in British primary school classrooms. Chapter One presents the historical background to early foreign language learning in Britain and describes the situation in primary schools in the 1990s. Chapter Two investigates the origins of the belief that younger is better, examines the literature on the age factor in second language development and in doing so, inevitably draws on a wide range of studies from a variety of contexts. Chapter Three reviews the learning outcomes from the Scottish National Pilot and compares these with outcomes from the Pilot Scheme, the first large-scale early foreign language learning project. Chapter Four deals with a range of substrates required in learning a foreign language efficiently and ultimately successfully within the artificial constraints of the classroom. Chapters Five and Six report the findings from case studies carried out in two primary schools in England and analyse and discuss data collected in these schools through lesson observations, interviews and questionnaires. It is argued that the belief that 'younger is better' for learning a foreign language in the classroom is not supported by a detailed examination of the literature on age in second language development. Learning outcomes from early foreign language learning projects both past and present do not provide convincing evidence that 'younger is better' for learning a foreign language in the classroom either. Data from the two case studies further indicate that 'younger' might not necessarily be 'better' for all children in all circumstances. The combined evidence thus suggests that the commonly held belief that 'younger is better' for the learning of a foreign language remains questionable.

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### **CHAPTER ONE**

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## Terminology

Central to this thesis is the distinction between acquiring a language in natural or near-natural circumstances and learning a language in a formal setting, usually a classroom. The former covers the so-called mother tongue and second languages used, for example, by relatives, colleagues and friends; the latter the foreign languages learnt as part of an educational process or to meet a putative future need. Such a distinction would seem self-evident but much of the literature in the field displays a degree of randomness in the use of terminology and concepts such as 'acquisition' and 'learning' or 'second' and 'foreign' are used inconsistently. As a result, crucial distinctions between language acquisition contexts and language learning contexts are frequently lost leading to confusion rather than clarification. Singleton (1989), for example, deliberately does not distinguish:

*"Language acquisition is not here distinguished from language learning...both expressions being used throughout the book, unless context and quotation marks indicate otherwise, in a comprehensive sense."* (Singleton, 1989: 7)

Linguistic distinctions and dichotomies are said to have 'fuzzy edges' which often merely 'reflect points on a continuum' (Ringboem, 1987: 3) and the usefulness of a dichotomy between Second Language Acquisition and Foreign Language Learning (SLA/FLL) is queried by Berns (1989), for example, in the context of the acquisition and learning of English. While accepting that a continuum best describes the shades of differences between acquiring and learning and that a hard and fast dichotomy is not always appropriate,

the writer of this thesis has to try consistently to distinguish between contexts and context-dependent variables as this thesis is above all concerned with institutionalised foreign language learning defined by Strevens as:

"The process which takes place when a learner sets out to learn a language other than his primary language (mother tongue or native language) given the mediation of a teacher and within a deliberately organized framework of instruction." (Strevens, 1978: 179)

In other words, with a context where contact with the target language is very limited and where the learner is trying to learn the language in a very artificial situation, remote from any real-life context. This learner is therefore 'quite different from the learner who is living in the country where the target language is spoken and even more significantly different from the pupil in the mother-tongue lesson' (Hornsey, 1981: 10).

Learning a language in a formal context is thus distinguished from 'picking up' a language without formal instruction but by informal and unorganized means such as acquiring a language in the country and from 'enhanced acquisition' that is acquiring a language in the country while at the same time receiving formal instruction in that same language:

"In environments where informal language development plays a significant part, it is possible to regard the formal classroom as supplemental, complementary, facilitating and consolidating." (Van Lier, 1988: 20)



It seems therefore essential not to fall into the trap of confusing the experience of an immigrant child learning English in an American school with that of a child learning French in a school located in the English-speaking world. However, it has to be admitted that, while every effort has been made to use available terminology consistently, it has not always been possible to do so. It would, for example, be confusing to discuss a quotation from another writer's work while trying to change that writer's terms and more than forty years of terminological confusion cannot simply be swept aside.

### **The Concept of 'Primary School Education'**

The term 'Primary School Education' carries a range of meanings in different parts of the world. The age at which children start primary education varies across countries as does the number of years children spend at their primary school. The age of transfer from primary to secondary school therefore also differs and what is conceived as primary school age in one country might be secondary school age in another. Eurydice, a series of publications by the European Commission on education across Europe, states that although there are characteristically three stages in the educational process between the ages of 2 and 18: pre-school, primary and secondary, the organisation and division of schooling as well as the school day and teaching time vary greatly from country to country. Children of the same age can therefore be experiencing different stages of schooling (Eurydice, 1994).

The 'Modern Languages in the Primary School' projects in Scotland are a case in point. Children originally involved in the Scottish Primary School Pilot Projects were aged eleven. In many countries as well as local education authorities (LEAs) in England, these children would be considered of secondary school age. By implication many children in English secondary schools as well as in schools in other countries are already learning a foreign language 'early'.

## Introduction

In the year 2000 the current moratorium on changes to the primary and secondary school curriculum for England and Wales will come to an end and a new curriculum for a new millennium will be launched. What exactly the future holds for the children in primary schools is not yet clear. While it might well be the case that, more than ever, people will need a higher level of knowledge and skills than they have needed in the past and while it might be true that the days of the uneducated worker and jobs for life might be gone, the questions of what education is for and what it means to be educated largely remain unanswered.

What sort of curriculum will be needed to equip children with the understanding, knowledge and skills necessary to play a full role in society? What should its content be, what subjects or aspects of subjects should it include? Devlin and Warnock argue that a child's life should be better for having learned a subject:

"The test, we have said, of whether something should have a place in the curriculum is whether a child's life will be better after leaving school for having learned it. Curriculum planners have tried to ensure that school either prepares a child for life or that the child has fulfilled his potential. Ideally, one would argue, they have aimed at both." (Devlin and Warnock, 1977: 63)

Few would question the primacy of literacy and numeracy skills in the English primary school curriculum as these are a prerequisite for all successful learning but what about a foreign language?

In July 1990 the House of Lords suggested that the language barrier 'could be the last restraint on economic freedom in the world market' and expressed concerns at the then Government's view that any major changes to the primary school curriculum in the area of foreign languages would be unlikely before the year 2010 (Hansard Volume 521, No 120, Friday, 13 July 1990).

Recommendations were made that:

"...foreign language teaching should be offered in primary schools. Planning should start for that now. Teacher training colleges should include foreign languages as an essential component of B.Ed. courses."

(Baroness Lockwood, Hansard Report 521, 1990: 561)

In the wake of the debate in the House of Lords the 1990 National Curriculum Report on Modern Foreign Languages stated that:

"We firmly believe that it is now desirable to identify the steps which need to be taken to make widespread teaching of modern foreign languages in primary schools possible and we have noted the recommendation of the House of Lords' select Committee on the European Communities Report to this effect."

(DES, National Curriculum Working Group Report, 1990, para 3.13)

Since the early 1990s calls for the introduction of a foreign language into the primary school curriculum have increased and much pressure from professional associations such as the Association for Language Learning (ALL) as well as from parents (see front page of the Times Educational Supplement, 15 October 1995), has been put on Governments, past and present, to make such an introduction. In May 1992 the National Association of Headteachers (NAHT)

gave backing to the teaching of foreign languages in primary schools (NALA View, June 1994) and the Association for Language Learning published a policy statement demanding the introduction of a foreign language at Key Stage Two at primary school on a national level (ALL, 1992).

A major National Pilot scheme has been under way in Scotland since 1989 and in England several Local Education Authorities offer a foreign language, usually French, to some or all children in their primary schools. The slimming down of the National Curriculum by Sir Ron Dearing in 1993 encouraged such developments in suggesting that 'freed time' in schools could be used for the teaching of a foreign language:

"My recommendation that the bulk of the time released during Key Stages 1 and 2 be used for extension work in the subject areas of the National Curriculum should not preclude the introduction of, say, a foreign language in Key Stage 2 if the school has the expertise to do this."

(Dearing Report, 1993: 38, para 4.46)

Only recently (January 1998) the Secretary of State for Education, David Blunkett, lifted the requirements for time spent on individual subject areas in the primary curriculum to allow schools to focus on the 3 Rs (reading, writing and arithmetic) and suggested that schools could offer 'taster courses' in other subject areas including Modern Languages 'if they wish to do so'.

Early schemes have received much support from bodies such as the Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research (CILT) and the Council of Europe through courses, conferences (CILT Conference Report, Southampton, 1994), publications such as the 'Young Pathfinder' series (CILT) and workshops. In 1997 the Council of Europe stated that an early start to foreign language learning was both desirable and feasible:

"The workshops, in one or other of which almost all member states were represented, have come firmly and unanimously to the conclusion that the lowering of the starting age is educationally both desirable and feasible."  
(Trim, cited in Doyé & Hurrell, 1997: 6)

In debates about the curriculum national needs can take precedence over individual needs and political considerations and professional interests over sound educational policy. During the run up to the General Elections in May 1997, the current Prime Minister, Tony Blair, called for the introduction of a foreign language into primary schools on a national scale and the Labour Party's policy document on Education 'Excellence for everyone: Labour's crusade to raise standards' stated that 'Labour will develop the teaching of foreign languages in primary schools to boost children's linguistic skills' (Labour Party, 1997, para 2.30). The dangers of 'politically' motivated curriculum proposals put forward in order to 'attract votes or please the electorate' are highlighted by Barrow who states that 'in the context of education one has a plain duty to seek out good reasons for doing educationally worthwhile things':

"What one should not do, unless we frankly admit that we are in the business of substituting honeyed words for sound argument, is incorporate into one's curriculum outline buzz-words that, while being vague and confused, are known to appeal to teachers, or references to popular but incoherent aims, and fashionable but unproven activities, simply in order to render the proposal attractive. The question of what is politically persuasive has to be kept entirely separate from our thinking about the curriculum itself...A persuasive curriculum is not necessarily a good one; a curriculum that fails to gain acceptance is not necessarily a bad one." (Barrow, 1984: 220/221)

In 1998 the Nuffield Foundation was commissioned to launch a national inquiry into language needs in the UK over the next 20 years with the aim of identifying 'whether our present capability in languages is sufficient to sustain the country in economic, political, strategic, social and cultural terms' ('Where are we going with Languages', The Nuffield Languages Inquiry, 1998).

Such developments give rise to a number of questions. Should the aims of learning a foreign language be purely 'utilitarian' and should the school curriculum be about skill training at all? Are primary schools 'market places' where parents should dictate the curriculum? Crucially and most importantly, however, is 'younger' indeed 'better'? It would appear that the reasons generally given as to **why** children should learn a foreign language do not justify the notion that they should do so from a young age.

In 1996 the then Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA) held an international conference where many of the issues surrounding an early start were raised and where the general tone was as much optimistic as it was cautious (for details see Conference Report published by SCAA, 1997).

Practical conditions, such as teacher supply, however, seemed to be the major consideration in the majority of the talks given while the underlying assumption that younger is better remained largely unchallenged.

Common wisdom thus holds that the younger the child starts the better and readers of both the popular press and educational publications have been subjected to slogans such as 'younger is better', 'let's do it' and 'catching them young'. However, an initial perusal of the literature on age in language learning, as well as teaching and observing children in a number of primary schools, suggest that 'younger' is not necessarily 'better'. If a repetition of the costly mistakes of the past, such as the Pilot Scheme (1963-1974) is to be avoided, it would seem vital that some of the beliefs and assumptions surrounding foreign language learning at primary school should be carefully re-examined and that lessons from the past as well as from the present should be learned before the introduction of any programme on a national scale. The following Chapter will briefly present the historical background to early language learning in the UK and a summary of the current situation. The Pilot Scheme for the teaching of French at primary school will be introduced as it had a major influence on developments in the 1970s and 1980s.



## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **The Historical Background to Early Language Learning Schemes and the Situation in the United Kingdom in the 1990s**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

Chapter One provides a framework for the thesis. It introduces what came to be known as the 'Pilot Scheme for the teaching of French in primary schools' (Burstall, Jamieson, Cohen and Hargreaves, 1974: 11) and presents the background to the Scheme as well as its main outcomes. It was decided that the Pilot Scheme should be introduced in the first chapter for a number of reasons. One, it had a major influence on developments in the 1970s and 1980s and still informs much of current thinking. Two, it remains the only major and completed investigation into young children of the same age and of all abilities learning a foreign language (French in this case) in state primary schools in England and Wales. Three, the outcomes of the Pilot Scheme were not what was generally expected at the time and challenged many of the assumptions underlying an early start.

The second half of the chapter summarises the situation in England, Wales and Northern Ireland in the mid 1990s and introduces the Scottish National Pilot which started in 1989. A more detailed discussion of both the outcomes of the Pilot Scheme as well as the Scottish National Pilot will form the focus of Chapter Three.

## **1.2 The Background to the Pilot Scheme**

Attempts to teach French to children in British state primary schools prior to the 1960s were 'sporadic, individual and quite uncoordinated' (Plowden, 1967). It was not until the early 1960s that more concentrated efforts were made in considering the teaching of French to pupils of all abilities in state primary schools. The Pilot Scheme was the first large-scale experiment in a foreign language at primary school. The Schools Council listed a number of factors which led to its establishment, such as a change in attitude towards the usefulness of language learning, the spread of the audio-visual methodology, new technologies, a growing sense of unity with European neighbours, the report of the Annan Committee (1962) which drew attention to the potential benefits for language learning in Britain if 'the regular teaching of a first modern language were started in good conditions and by the right methods in primary schools' and the support given by the Nuffield Foundation to pioneering experiments in language teaching at the primary level, such as the experiment in Leeds carried out by Kellermann (Schools Council 1966: 1). The following pages will briefly discuss the political and economic climate at the time, the potential contribution of UNESCO to developments, the influence of the Annan Committee as well as the Kellermann project carried out in 1961.

### **1.2.1 The Post World War II Political and Economic Climate**

The post World War II need for economic development, for improved international relations and for better cross-cultural understanding created an atmosphere which was most favourable for language learning across the world.

America seemed to suffer a 'practical communication crisis' (Stack, 1964) with a severe shortage of people with foreign language skills and teaching children a foreign language from a young age was deemed politically and economically desirable. The 1958 National Defence Act declared Modern Languages an area in need of special support and subsequently made large sums of money available to the Foreign Language in the Elementary School (FLES) projects. Within a couple of years FLES programmes sprang up all over America and grew rapidly due to strong support from state and local government as well as from the Modern Languages Association. In Britain, application for entry into the Common Market in 1961, although at the time unsuccessful, drew attention to the need for improved trade relations with other countries as well as for increased travel and, by implication, to the need for people with foreign language skills.

### **1.2.2 The Contribution of UNESCO to Early Language Learning Developments**

According to Stern, two UNESCO-sponsored international meetings in Hamburg in 1962 and 1966 were intended to promote research into early language teaching and on the effectiveness of an early start (Stern, 1996: 364). The aim of the 1962 conference was 'to evaluate reports from investigations into the effectiveness of early language teaching in schools around the world' (Stern, 1963). These reports showed the feasibility of an early start and that young children responded positively but, more importantly, as Stern argued 'the *superiority* of an early start over a later start was not proved' (Stern, 1996: 364).

Nevertheless, economic, political, social and educational arguments for an early start were stressed and delegates came to the conclusion that the political, economic and cultural situation of the time demanded 'a crossing of language and national barriers in the earliest phases of schooling' and that 'there should be contact with another language and culture in primary education'.

Many of the observations and reports presented at the conference were based on countries where two officially recognised and coexisting languages, such as French and English in Canada for example, might make the early teaching of a second language a necessity for full citizenship. While lessons could, and can, be learnt from early language learning projects in other countries, it remains difficult to see how one could simply extrapolate findings from other countries to the specific context in England. In countries where a child's educational and social future depends on the mastery of a second language, early language learning takes on quite a specific role but such a context differs greatly from the specific context in England where any real or perceived future language needs are difficult to predict from an early age. An early start in a foreign language, traditionally French, had been customary in selective English preparatory schools. Hawkins (1981) states that in these private schools languages had been taught successfully to selected and motivated pupils but, as Stern claimed, these early starts did not provide proof of any definite advantages over a later start either:

"These experiences in early language learning were not considered to provide overwhelming proof of the great advantage of an early start. On the contrary, they led to a vigorous demand, around 1950, for early education in the mother tongue (UNESCO 1953)." (Stern, 1996: 361/2)

### **1.2.3 The Annan Report**

Hawkins (1981) stated that the Annan Report (1962) made a seminal contribution to the teaching of French in schools. The Annan Committee went beyond its brief on the teaching and development of the Russian language at secondary school and proposed that it would be advantageous if a first foreign language would be started at the primary school if such teaching were to take place 'in good conditions and by the right methods'.

### **1.2.4 The Kellermann Project**

One experiment in teaching French to young children in state primary schools, the Kellermann experiment, took place in Leeds in 1961 and was to give strong support to the Pilot Scheme. Kellermann, a bilingual teacher, taught French from March 1961 to July 1961 to a specially selected group of boys and girls who had just passed the 11+ examination and had gained a place at grammar school. Children were taught French for 21 periods a week with the initial focus on spoken language. Written work was introduced after 3 weeks when aspects of history and geography were also taught in French. As Kellermann (1964) reported, these highly motivated children were taught in 'optimum conditions' with the full support of the headteacher, staff and parents alike. She put her success down to 'a fortunate coincidence of various factors' such as excellent

conditions, plenty of resources and materials, the intensity of the course made possible through partial exclusion of other subjects from the timetable, the fact that she herself was a native speaker and qualified teacher, the high IQ of the children and not least their interest and enthusiasm which was partially due to the special attention they were given:

"I was given optimum conditions to work in, such as one cannot normally hope to find in primary schools, and it was therefore not surprising that we achieved good results." (Kellermann, 1964: 3)

The Schools Council reported that 'encouraged by the success of the Leeds experiment and by the interest which it had aroused the Nuffield Foundation began discussions with the Ministry's Curriculum Study Group about the establishment of a pilot project' (Schools Council, 1966:1). It remains difficult to understand, however, how such a 'special' project could have served as a springboard for a national large-scale project with a wide range of children in a wide range of schools. A second experiment carried out by Kellermann in 1964 yielded quite different results. This experiment, where French was taught to children of mixed ability by 'competent' primary teachers, gave rise to a number of important questions, not least concerning the suitability of the audio-visual methodology in teaching a foreign language to young children. Despite Kellermann's concerns, the audio-visual methodology was widely and unquestioningly adopted during the Pilot Scheme. How this might have affected the final outcome of the Pilot Scheme will be discussed in Chapter Three in the context of a review of outcomes from the current Scottish National Pilot.

The Pilot Scheme thus received encouragement from a number of sources.

For the purpose of this Chapter a brief summary of the Pilot Scheme, its main findings and the effects on the teaching of French in primary schools during the 1970s and 1980s will follow.

### **1.3 The Pilot Scheme**

The Pilot Scheme was widely reported on by the Schools Council (1966), Burstall (1968, 1970, 1977, 1978), Burstall, Jamieson, Cohen and Hargreaves (Burstall et al., 1974) and Hawkins (1981, 1996b). The Pilot Scheme was launched on 13 March 1963 by then Minister of Education, Sir Edward Boyle, and sponsored jointly by the Ministry of Education and the Nuffield Foundation and later the Schools Council, established in 1964 (Schools Council Working Papers No 8, 1966: iii). Thirteen pilot areas had been chosen across England and Wales with a total of 125 schools thought to be representative of the country as a whole (Schools Council, 1966: 9). The selection of pupils was based on their date of birth alone, thus leading to a representative sample of pupils from all socio-economic backgrounds and of all abilities.

Teaching started in September 1964 involving approximately 6000 children aged eight. A second cohort of a similar number of pupils started in 1965 but a third cohort had to be introduced in 1968, due to 'unforeseen staffing and organisational problems'.

According to the Schools Council the main aim of the Pilot Scheme was to ascertain:

"...on what conditions it would be feasible to contemplate the general introduction of a modern language into the primary school curriculum in terms of the consequences for the pupil, the school and the teacher." (Schools Council, 1966: 3)

The Schools Council stressed that the Ministry of Education 'was anxious to structure any experiment in such a way as to yield useful information about the feasibility of introducing French into the primary curriculum'. It was not the aim of the Pilot Scheme 'to establish whether or not it is possible to teach French successfully in primary schools'. The Schools Council claimed that 'this was obviously possible' and referred to 'Primary Education', published in 1959 for the Ministry of Education, which had stated that 'the teaching of a modern language was possible with abler pupils in primary schools (basing its opinion on the sporadic teaching that had already taken place), but that conditions were rarely suitable' (Schools Council, 1966: 3). The Schools Council stated further that it was the purpose of the Pilot Scheme to ascertain 'whether or not an earlier start provided identifiable advantages over starting at 11' (Schools Council, 1966: 5) and listed the main issues to be addressed as follows:

1. Is any substantial gain in mastery of a foreign language achieved by beginning to teach it at 8 instead of 11?
2. Do other aspects of educational and general intellectual development gain or suffer from the introduction of a foreign language in the primary school?



3. What are the organisational, teaching and other problems posed by such an experiment?
4. Are there levels of ability below which the teaching of French is of dubious value?
5. What methods, incentives and motivations are most effective in fostering learning of a foreign language? (Schools Council, 1966: 3)

It would thus seem that a number of reasons underpinned the Pilot Scheme, to identify 'on what conditions it would be feasible to contemplate the introduction of a modern language into the primary school' and to ascertain 'whether an early start would provide identifiable advantages over starting at the age of eleven'. The above points, in combination with the nature of the Pilot Scheme in the form of a 'feasibility study', would seem to suggest that the 'younger is better' view was not necessarily accepted, at least not for all children of all abilities. It would thus seem difficult to establish beyond doubt to what degree Penfield & Roberts' (1959) theory of a critical age was accepted by all those involved in the Pilot Scheme. In fact, Burstall et al. later stated that the main purpose of the Pilot Scheme was to discover:

"...whether it would be feasible and educationally desirable to extend the teaching of a foreign language to pupils who represented a wider range of age and ability than those to whom foreign languages had traditionally been taught." (Burstall et al., 1974: 11)

It was also hoped that the results of their evaluation of the Pilot Scheme would provide sufficient information:

"...to enable valid conclusions to be drawn regarding the feasibility and advisability of teaching French at the primary level." (Burstall et al., 1974: 12)

What might be feasible, however, might not necessarily be educationally desirable and the identification of necessary conditions does not clarify whether an early start provides identifiable advantages over starting at the age of eleven. The inclusion of the crucial variable of ability in the consideration 'whether it would be feasible and educationally desirable to extend the teaching of a foreign language to pupils who represented a wider range of age and ability than those to whom foreign languages had traditionally been taught' would seem to suggest that in the Pilot Scheme two crucial variables, age and ability, and the problems associated with the two ideas have often become 'intermingled' (Kunkle, 1977: 254).

### **1.3.1 Language Choice**

Annan (1962) described the existing entrenched position of the French language:

"French is safeguarded by geography and tradition; it will naturally remain an important language in this country, the more so if Britain joins the Common Market. As France is our nearest neighbour and French history and culture are part of our heritage, French is nearly always the first modern language to be taught." (Annan Report, 1962: para 56, cited in Hawkins, 1981: 63)

Donald Riddy, then Staff Inspector for Modern Languages, explained the reasons why French was chosen for the Pilot Scheme:

"...only in French could we have hoped to find the necessary number of teachers. Almost all primary teachers have had at least a five year course in French when they were at school themselves, and it seemed reasonable to hope that, with additional local courses and the provision of intensive courses, many of them would be able to teach the language in the primary schools."  
(The Schools Council Working Paper 8, 1966: 30)

French was also the most widely provided and resourced language in secondary schools and the proximity of France made on the spot training for teachers as well as school visits a distinct possibility. It was hoped that pupils would learn other languages such as German, Spanish or Italian at secondary school. However, as both primary and secondary schools taking part in the project were required by the then Department of Education and Science (DES) to offer French to all eight year-old children and as children were to continue with French at least up to the age of 13 with secondary schools to guarantee continuity of provision on transfer, this hope did not materialise and the widespread introduction of French into primary schools had a negative effect on the provision of other languages at secondary school. Issues surrounding language choice are of major importance, especially in an English-speaking context and will be discussed again later in this study.

### **1.3.2 Teacher Training**

Training of primary school teachers consisted of a minimum of six months' attendance at a part-time language refresher course organised locally, followed by attendance at a three-month intensive language course in France or Britain

and finally attendance at a short course on methods of presenting the language to junior pupils (Schools Council, 1966: 3). The literature on the Pilot Scheme suggests that most training took place in language laboratories and through audio-visual methodology and materials. A number of colleges started to offer BEd courses in French, also based on the audio-visual methodology (Hoy, 1977).

### **1.3.3 Methodology and Materials Used in the Pilot Scheme**

Hawkins (1981) reports that the 'Bonjour Line' and 'En Avant' audio-visual courses for children were used by schools participating in the Pilot Scheme as well as in associated schools and Wigram, staff inspector for foreign languages, reports that both audio-visual methodology and materials produced by the Nuffield Foundation were widely used and adhered to closely during the Pilot Scheme in both primary and secondary schools (Wigram, 1973). According to the Schools Council (1966: 6) 80 per cent of the schools in the pilot areas were using the Nuffield materials.

### **1.3.4 Patterns of Provision**

Lessons were normally taught by primary class teachers on a daily basis for around 20-30 minutes. The majority of teachers seemed to think that 30 minutes a day was plenty of time for most children. The general pattern of timetabling varied considerably from school to school, with clearly set aside lessons for French in some schools and the teaching of parts of lessons through French in others.

#### **1.4 The NFER Evaluation of the Pilot Scheme**

The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) was to assess pupils' achievement in French with speaking, listening, reading and writing test materials produced by the Nuffield Foundation. The progress of the early starters was to be compared with that of the 11+ starters on a year by year basis and three batteries of achievement tests were to be administered to cohort pupils and control groups. Measurement of attitude amongst primary and secondary school pupils as well amongst teachers and headteachers was to be carried out through questionnaires. In addition, Her Majesty's Inspectorate were to make a general appraisal of the Pilot Scheme. This was included in the NFER interim report (Burstall, 1970).

The tone of Burstall's first report published in 1968 appeared generally favourable. The second report (Burstall, 1970), however, already hinted at some problem areas such as the difficulties experienced by the so-called 'less able' children. The final report on the Pilot Scheme 'Primary French in the Balance' (Burstall, Jamieson, Cohen & Hargreaves, 1974) presented the outcomes of the Pilot Scheme in terms of the likely gains or losses for all involved. The following pages will briefly summarise the findings to the Schools Council's original questions as these influenced developments over the past 30 years. A comparison with recent outcomes from early foreign language projects in England and Scotland will take place in Chapter Three.

### **1.4.1 Assessment of Outcomes**

The final NFER report (Burstall et al., 1974) presented the following findings to the Schools Council's original questions (the phrasing of these questions in the 1974 report has been retained):

Question One: Do other aspects of education and general intellectual development gain or suffer from the introduction of French teaching in the primary school?

There appeared to be neither profit nor loss in answer to this question.

Children's development of basic literacy and numeracy skills in the mother-tongue was not adversely affected by the learning of French, neither was there any increased proficiency in first language skills because of the learning of French:

"The evidence does not lend support to the view that the introduction of a foreign language at the primary level must inevitably retard the acquisition of basic skills, nor does it encourage the belief that teaching a foreign language to primary school children will necessarily stimulate the development of verbal skills in their mother tongue." (Burstall et al., 1974: 42)

It was also reported that the introduction of French did not have any significant influence on achievement in other areas of the curriculum. However, the original question would seem rather 'naive' in light of the methodology applied at the time and these findings should not have come as a surprise. How 'methodology' can influence first language development will be discussed further at a later stage. It was also reported that at secondary school level the early teaching of French had a negative effect on the provision of other

languages. The important question of language choice will be discussed again at a later stage.

Question Two: Are there levels of ability below which the teaching of French is of dubious value?

Burstall et al. reported that there were some indications that:

"...even the least able could achieve some measure of success in the early stages of learning French, although this success was rarely of a lasting kind. On the other hand, large numbers of children patently failed to achieve even a modest and impermanent measure of success." (Burstall et al., 1974: 242)

It was suggested that this was partly a consequence of teaching through the medium of French and the failure to differentiate French teaching objectives according to children's differing needs and capabilities. Some children developed a sense of failure and negative attitudes during their first year and for these children learning French was a 'profitless' experience. The introduction of reading and writing, especially, seemed to widen the gap between individual children and the initial achievement of special needs children disappeared quickly when reading and writing skills were introduced. The more able children, on the other hand, would have liked a much earlier introduction to reading and writing than had been the case. Burstall et al. concluded that:

"Unless there is a sustained effort to redefine the objectives of teaching French in order to meet pupils' differing needs, some children will not realize their full potential, while others will inevitably experience failure."  
(Burstall et al., 1974: 243)

Issues surrounding the concept of 'ability' in learning a foreign language in the classroom will be raised again in Chapters Three and Four.

Question Three: Is any substantial gain in mastery achieved by beginning to learn French at the age of eight?

This question was the Schools Council's main concern and was answered 'unequivocally in the negative'. It was reported that those children who had started to learn French at 11 quickly caught up with the early starters. The initial headstart which the cohort pupils had when they started secondary school soon began to disappear and by the age of 16 the project pupils only had a slight advantage in listening skills. Such a small advantage, Burstall et al. concluded, did not justify the extra years the project children had spent learning French (Burstall et al., 1974: 243).

Question Four: What methods, attitudes and incentives are the most effective in promoting the learning of French?

Burstall et al. found that 'there was no single method equally appropriate for all children'. High-achieving pupils rejected the audio-visual approach in favour of more traditional methods. Burstall et al. and Kellermann previously, reported that the more 'able' children were not happy with endless repetition and imitation, asked for explanations of vocabulary and structures and wanted to know what they were learning and why they were learning it. Low-achieving pupils reacted favourably to the audio-visual approach but experienced difficulties when reading and writing were introduced. Many children disliked reading aloud in class which they associated with embarrassment and a barrier



to understanding and all children, regardless of levels of achievement, strongly disliked the tape recorder which they associated with 'enforced passivity, repetition and incomprehension' (Burstall et al., 1974: 244). Those pupils who were 'successful' in learning French appeared to retain a more favourable attitude towards speaking the language. Burstall (1970) and Burstall et al. (1974) reported that an early successful experience in learning French seemed to affect later attitudes and achievement more than early positive attitudes:

"In the language-learning context, nothing succeeds like success."  
(Burstall et al., 1974: 244).

Burstall et al. (1974: 244) reported that where pupils appeared to gain was not in 'mastery' but in attitude 'if they were successful in their efforts'. A more positive attitude, however, was not reflected in a correspondingly higher level of achievement. It was also reported that for those children who experienced a sense of failure, the experiment led to very negative attitudes. These children decided that French was not for them and dropped the subject at the earliest possible opportunity.

Burstall et al. also reported that pupils generally seemed to display positive attitudes towards other cultures but that the capacity for empathy appeared to reach a peak around the age of 10 and then go into steady decline, especially amongst boys. The prospect of a visit to France seemed a most powerful incentive for pupils; the absence of such a prospect, however, had a highly demotivating effect on children who, as a result, thought that learning French

was a waste of time. The findings to Question Four raise a number of important issues which will be discussed further later in the thesis.

Question Five: What organizational and teaching problems are posed by the introduction of French teaching in the primary school?

Organisational problems were reported as numerous both at primary and secondary school level. The structure of the school day was a major problem in the primary schools. An integrated day could often not be maintained as class teachers would also teach French to other classes or the flexibility of the timetable had been constrained to accommodate visiting foreign language specialists. Burstall et al. reported that the idea of replacing the 'fluid' timetable with a 'fixed' timetable was not welcomed by many teachers who objected to the 'indirect specialisation' caused by the introduction of French. Continuity between primary and secondary school was one of the major concerns.

Originally planned separate classes at secondary school for those children who had started French at primary school were frequently not feasible due to the small number of pupils involved. One can only speculate that the introduction of the comprehensive school system and the demand for mixed-ability teaching in the mid-1960s might have made the idea of separate classes rather 'unpopular'. It will later be seen that 'practical conditions' and 'organisational problems' still form the major focus of current debates surrounding an early start while some of the other crucial findings, for example the finding that the later starters quickly caught up with the early starters, receive scant or no attention.

### **1.4.2 Other Findings on Achievement**

The 1974 NFER report also commented on the effects of other variables on achievement such as gender, socio-economic status, parental support and encouragement and previous learning history. It was found that high achievement scores tended to coincide with high-status parental occupations. Girls in both primary and secondary schools consistently scored higher than boys irrespective of social class. Pupils in small rural schools performed better than those in larger schools, those in single-sex schools better than those in mixed schools and pupils in the South of England performed better than those in the North. Based on their findings Burstall, Jamieson, Cohen and Hargreaves arrived at the following final conclusion:

"Now that the results of the evaluation are finally available, however, it is hard to resist the conclusion that the weight of the evidence has combined with the balance of opinion to tip the scales against a possible expansion of the teaching of French in primary schools." (Burstall et al., 1974: 246)

The 'death sentence' on French in the primary school was soon to be passed by the media at the time. The outcomes of the Pilot Scheme quite clearly challenged the commonly held assumption that younger is better and had a major impact on the teaching of French in British primary schools post 1974. In 1975 national funding for primary foreign languages in England and Wales was withdrawn, the teaching of French in primary schools went into steady decline and by the late 1970s it had all but disappeared from the primary school curriculum.

However, a vast amount of resources, both human and material, had been invested in the Pilot Scheme and while the findings by Burstall et al. were generally accepted at the time, the conclusion drawn was not accepted by all. As the success of the Pilot Scheme had largely been judged on the basis of pupils' achievement in French, it seemed only natural that most of the research that followed should focus on those factors that could have affected achievement. The following sections will summarise the critique.

### **1.5 Critiques of the NFER's Final Conclusion**

Test validity, the composition of control groups, size of cohort samples, continuity, methodology and teacher training all came under criticism, for example by Bennett (1975), Gamble & Smalley (1975), Buckby (1976), Kunkle (1976), Lee (1977), Hoy (1977). Both Bennett (1975) and Gamble & Smalley (1975) pointed to the fact that due to pupil mobility and drop out rates, the total number of pupils tested had declined sharply from 11,300 in 1964 to 1,227 pupils in 1973 and argued that percentage results were therefore not based on the original number of pupils taking part in the experiment but on shrinking samples. Bennett also reported that experimental cohorts and control groups had not been matched in respect of 3 crucial variables: gender, type of school and social class. He argued that, given what was known about better performances by girls and by pupils from higher socio-economic backgrounds, a closer match between cohort pupils and control groups might have led to a different result. Buckby (1976) questioned the content validity of the test material and claimed that the tests did not focus sufficiently on speaking and

listening skills, the skills on which children had mainly focused at primary schools. Original plans of separate classes for cohort children when they moved to secondary school did not materialise and cohort pupils were taught alongside the 11+ starters. The effect this might have had on initially high levels of motivation amongst the early starters seemingly made meaningful comparisons of achievement levels difficult. Lee (1977) suggested that in the absence of any detailed knowledge of the teaching processes that took place in secondary schools it was difficult to establish why the original headstart of the cohort children had not been maintained. The use of terminology would also seem a decisive factor in the evaluation of any project. Just how exactly both researchers and evaluators of the Pilot Scheme had interpreted terms such as 'balance of opinion', 'success', 'substantial' and 'profitless' remains unclear.

One of the most important points, however, was made by Hawkins who stated that the teaching of French to primary school children represented an extension both vertically and horizontally:

"...vertically down the age-range to pupils below the age of 11+ and horizontally across the 'ability' range to pupils who would not previously have been offered a language because they failed to secure entry to a selective, academic school or stream." (Hawkins, 1981: 11)

Hawkins' statement and the critique summarised above raise a number of important points which will be taken up again in Chapters Three and Four.

### **1.5.1 The 1976 Nuffield Foundation Survey**

The Nuffield Foundation carried out a new survey of the Pilot Scheme in an effort to counterbalance the negative verdict of the NFER evaluation and to establish under what conditions it would be feasible to introduce French into primary schools. The survey aimed to investigate the impact of the Pilot Scheme, review the situation of primary school French and consider any possible scope for development (Hoy, 1976, 1977).

The results of the survey, based on 71 returns from 105 questionnaires sent to primary and secondary schools, were reported in 1977 by staff inspector Hoy in 'The Early Teaching of Modern Languages'. It was reported that an increase had taken place in the teaching of French at secondary school but that there was a notable decrease in the teaching of French in primary schools. Schools commented positively on the experiment and thought that they had gained a better understanding of the teaching of languages, they commented on the large amount of useful materials the experiment had produced and on the expansion in the support and training for modern languages. However, teachers also aired a number of concerns. These were in the main a lack of suitably qualified staff, inadequate methodology, lack of continuity between the primary and the secondary phase, the view that French was incompatible with the educational philosophy of primary schools whose main task was seen as developing the basic skills of literacy and numeracy and the view that the status of English as a world language made the study of another language seem redundant.

The quality of work in schools that did continue with the teaching of French was deemed good, possibly because these schools represented the 'survival of the fittest'. The teaching of French in these schools was not investigated closely enough, however, to establish exactly what it was that was deemed 'good' in relation to the aims and objectives these schools had set themselves and their pupils, in relation to methodology or in relation to teacher competence.

### **1.5.2 Conditions for Success**

What exactly the aims and objectives of an early start might be, what might constitute adequate methods or adequate teacher training was not made clear nor was any relationship between these individual aspects established and what would seem a rather 'vague' list of conditions for success was put forward:

- clear short and long term aims and objectives
- a sufficient supply of adequately trained teachers
- adequate methodologies
- the integration of French into the whole primary school curriculum
- continuity of provision between primary and secondary school
- contact with the target culture
- the assessment of progress

The conditions identified during the Nuffield survey were not completely new either. In 1972 the then Department of Education and Science (DES) had already published the following statement:

"Experience now shows that clear conditions must be fulfilled if primary French is to succeed. Some local educational authorities now wisely insist on continuity between primary and secondary school French; on adequately qualified staff; on a reasonable time allocation; and on the use of appropriate materials. Without these minimum conditions it seems better to leave the subject alone." (Hoy, 1977: 6)

Ten years prior to the 1977 Nuffield survey the Plowden report had already made the important point that:

"...far too many schools have introduced French without having a teacher who possesses even minimum qualifications, without consideration of what constitutes a satisfactory scheme and time-table and without any consultation with receiving secondary schools. This can only be deplored. No good purpose can possibly be served by it. Without a teacher who is well qualified linguistically and in methods suitable for primary schools, it is better to have nothing to do with French. The presence of a native French speaker, while it guarantees the former, often fails to provide the latter."

(Plowden Report, 1967: 225, para 617/v)

Thirty years on, many of the current early foreign language learning schemes employ native language assistants from abroad. While these assistants can undoubtedly bring some of the target culture into the classroom, their ability and competence to 'teach' their mother tongue to young children cannot be taken for granted. What it means to be 'linguistically qualified' to 'teach' a foreign language to young children, however, remains to be established and would seem to depend largely on the aims of a scheme. These points will be discussed again at a later stage.



The Nuffield Foundation subsequently advised against a general expansion of the teaching of French but recommended a 'continuation of the early teaching of French in areas where it has proved its worth, provided that these conditions for success were being fulfilled'. The National Association of Language Advisers (NALA) supported this view provided that 'shortcomings in current practice were rectified'. Inspector Wigram had already suggested in 1973 that schools which were unable to meet these conditions should 'refrain from half-hearted primary French teaching and leave it to the secondary schools who were equipped to do it properly'.

As with the results of the Pilot Scheme the results of the American FLES programmes were not what many had expected and by the end of the 1970s many of the FLES programmes had also come to an end. As in the British context a number of very different factors were given as explanations and financial restrictions, staff shortages, lack of continuity and inadequate methodologies were all reported as potential reasons for the end of the programmes (Page, 1966, Oller & Nagato, 1974, Donoghue & Kunkle, 1979). However, the audiolingual methodology seemed to have been held mainly responsible for the failure of the FLES programmes. Page, a teacher at an American primary school which dropped the FLES programme early, reported that teachers found behaviorist stimulus-response method and materials totally inadequate for the teaching of the structural properties of language. As time went on, both teachers and pupils became more and more disillusioned with the whole project and when many children started to regress and began to hate

French before they even studied it seriously, the school decided to stop the programme:

"This psychological phenomenon was our prime reason for urging that the FLES programme be dropped." (Page, 1966: 140)

The potential role of the audio-visual methodology in affecting learning outcomes will be discussed in detail in Chapter Three. The remainder of this chapter will briefly discuss the situation in the 1990s in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland before the crucial question whether younger is better will be addressed in Chapter Two.

## **1.6 The Situation in the 1990s in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland**

Despite the withdrawal of national funding and support a number of schools continued with the teaching of French to primary school children. By 1992 there were about 20 Local Education Authorities (LEAs) offering a modern language, usually French, to children of primary school age. Some had survived from the 60s and 70s while others had been set up in the 1980s. Some LEAs had produced guidelines, schemes of work and materials for teachers (CILT, 1994, Information Sheet 55). In Scotland a large-scale National Pilot introducing foreign languages into primary schools was implemented in 1989. The following paragraphs will briefly discuss the current situation in primary schools across the UK.

### **1.6.1 The Situation in England, Wales and Northern Ireland**

The state of foreign language teaching in English primary schools in the early 1990s was reminiscent of that referred to in the Plowden Report, 'sporadic', 'individual' and 'unco-ordinated'. The randomness of the situation in the early 1990s and the potential inherent 'traps' of such random experiences was discussed by Poole (1995). 'Modern Foreign Languages in Primary Schools' (CILT, March 1995) is CILT's attempt to summarise the situation in the mid 1990s in maintained primary schools in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The CILT report is based on a survey carried out in August 1994 by means of a questionnaire sent to Language Advisers in 125 Local Education Authorities (LEAs) with a response rate of 42%. As CILT reported, it became very difficult to arrive at a clear picture of the current situation 'as the questionnaire was addressed to LEAs rather than individual schools'. One might, however, question the 'wisdom' of sending questionnaires to LEAs rather than to schools when, under Local Management of Schools (LMS), any decision on foreign language teaching provision quite clearly lies within the schools themselves. As only less than half of the Local Education Authorities responded, the questionnaires only provide a 'snapshot' of the overall situation rather than specific details (CILT, 1995: 3). The following sections will present a brief summary of the report's main findings under the headings of 'overall provision', 'languages taught', 'starting age', 'nature of provision', 'patterns of provision and amount of teaching time', 'staffing and staff training' and 'transfer to secondary school'.

#### **1.6.1.1 Overall Provision**

Overall provision is reported by CILT as varied, patchy and generally uncoordinated (CILT, 1995: 3-5). One unidentified local authority adviser commented that 'if there are  $n$  primary schools offering a foreign language, there are  $n$  different ways in which it is organised' (CILT, 1995: 8). Out of a total of 8808 primary schools in 53 LEAs, 1919 were reported as providing some foreign language teaching, representing 21.8% of the primary schools in the sample. Early foreign language provision within a Local Education Authority ranged from 1.9% to 86% of schools.

Only 35 LEAs responded to a question on pupil numbers. As a number of LEAs simply reported 'a global picture', figures are based on estimates only but from these responses CILT extrapolated a total number of around 305,000 children in primary schools in England, Wales and Northern Ireland receiving 'some sort of provision' in a foreign language. Out of a total school population of around 4.5 million primary school children this represents between five and six per cent.

#### **1.6.1.2 Languages Taught**

French is by far the most widely taught language, offered in 93.5 % of the schools and taught 'over 26 times more' than any other language. The teaching of German, Italian or Spanish is thinly spread amounting to a total of less than 10% between these languages.

### **1.6.1.3 Starting Age**

The earliest starting age is reported as five, the most common starting age appears to be nine, with the arithmetic mean at 8.8 years (CILT, 1995: 6).

The age at which children start to learn a foreign language is left to individual schools and does not seem to be consistent within or across authorities. It also seems to be the case that not all schools offer a foreign language to all pupils of a certain age although there does not seem to be any indication of who is left out and why.

### **1.6.1.4 Nature of Provision**

The report states that 'European Awareness' is offered in 559 schools (29%). These schools focus on links, exchanges and visits. 'Language Awareness' is included in 341 schools (18%) and around 300 schools offer a mixture of both (CILT, 1995: 6). Language Advisers generally seemed to prefer an approach which linked European Awareness with Language Awareness. However, as has become clear from discussions with colleagues as well as from observations, the concept of 'language awareness' is interpreted in a variety of ways by schools and in some cases seems to be limited to teaching children how to say 'hello' in several European languages.

### **1.6.1.5 Pattern of Provision and Amount of Teaching Time**

Teaching time varies from 10 minutes to 120 minutes per week. Both frequency and length of lessons vary widely. Some schools offer a short session each day others offer one lengthy session every week. The most common pattern seems

to be one lesson a week. In some schools French is embedded into the curriculum, in others it appears on the timetable as a separate subject. In most LEAs there is a mixture of timetabled and extra-curricular provision. Although the report refers to a significant expansion in private out-of-school activities and private language clubs, it is not clear who attends these clubs and whether what traditionally has been a socio-economically advantaged group now includes children of all backgrounds and abilities.

#### **1.6.1.6 Staffing and Staff Training**

CILT reports that 'of the 36 LEAs which provided a response to this question, 35 employed class teachers and 22 employed a mixture of class teachers and visiting teachers (CILT, 1995: 7). CILT reports that there are 455 'qualified' MFL teachers with a teaching qualification in Modern Foreign Languages or an A-Level or above and 410 'non-qualified' teachers. Sixteen LEAs provided some form of training in methodology and/or linguistic training and 20 LEAs reported that they received some form of support from outside agencies such as the French Embassy or the Goethe Institute. These figures suggest that out of the 53 LEAs who originally responded only 30% provide some form of training for their teachers. These crucial issues of teacher qualification and competence will be followed up again in later chapters in the context of evaluating learning outcomes.

### **1.6.1.7 Transfer to Secondary School**

Records of achievement seem to be the main form of liaison between primary and secondary schools with some mutual visits, taster lessons and collaborative planning in some cases. However, the CILT report also stated that in 47% of the LEAs there was no official liaison between primary and secondary schools.

### **1.6.1.8 Conclusions Drawn from the CILT Report**

The context in which some primary schools are offering 'some sort of provision' would appear less than 'ideal'. There seems to be a clear lack of consensus on aims and objectives and a lack of suitably qualified staff reflected in the wide range of patterns of provision including aspects of European awareness, language awareness and foreign language teaching. At present, there is little continuity between primary and secondary schools. The reader might like to compare the current scenario with the conditions identified by the Nuffield Foundation in 1977 (see page 43) as necessary for the success of a scheme:

- clear short and long term aims and objectives
- a sufficient supply of adequately trained teachers
- adequate methodologies
- the integration of French into the whole primary school curriculum
- continuity of provision between primary and secondary school
- contact with the target culture
- the assessment of progress

### 1.6.2 The Situation in Scotland

The following pages will briefly present the National Pilot in Scotland which introduced foreign languages into the primary school curriculum in 1989.

In 1988 the Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum (SCCC) published the following statement:

"The SCCC is clear that present circumstances render impracticable the inclusion of a foreign language in the primary curriculum. However, we have felt it important to ask ourselves the question: If such an addition to primary curriculum were realisable in terms of necessary resourcing, would it be a desirable addition? We have come to the conclusion that, from the perspective of national linguistic needs, there appears at present to be no compelling justification for such an addition to the primary curriculum. On the other hand, the longer term possibility of foreign language learning in primary schools cannot be ruled out." (SCCC, 1988: 4)

Further it was stated that the Consultative Committee on the Curriculum (CCC) Discussion Paper "Education 10-14 in Scotland" included the explicit statement:

"We do not recommend that languages other than English should be taught formally in primary schools with the object of producing competent speakers in a particular language. That contribution to curriculum, which is of a different nature and subserving different purposes from those here discussed, should begin in the secondary school." (SCCC, 1988: 4)

It was also stated in the context of classical languages at primary school that 'classicists and modern linguists alike have a part to play *in the development of general language awareness* (writer's italics) at primary as well as secondary stage' (SCCC, 1988: 5) and that encounters with foreign languages at primary



as well as later stages, can make 'a significant contribution to a person's awareness of language as a system'.

#### **1.6.2.1 The Scottish National Pilot**

A year later, in autumn 1989, the National Pilot was launched by the Scottish Office Education Department (SOED). The Scottish National Pilot represents the first major wide-scale introduction of foreign languages into the primary school curriculum since the Pilot Scheme and has been extensively reported on by Low, Duffield, Brown, Johnstone (Low et al., 1993, interim report) and Low, Brown, Johnstone, Pirrie (Low et al., 1995, final report), the SOED (1993) and The Scottish Office Education and Industry Department (SOEID, 1995), Johnstone (1991, 1996) and Johnstone, Low & Brown (1996). The first phase (phase A) began in 1989 and included six secondary schools and their associated primary schools teaching French or German to pupils aged 11 in their last year (P7) at primary school (SOEID, HMSO, J1354, 12/95). It has already been stated that the age of eleven would be regarded as secondary school age in many countries as well as in education authorities in England. However, more than 40% of the classes proved to be 'composite' with pupils aged 10 to 11 and in some cases included eight and nine year-olds. In its second year (Phase B) in autumn 1990 the Pilot was extended to include a further 6 secondary schools and their associated primary schools and pupils in P6 (Primary Six) and, in some schools, P4 (Primary Four). The National Pilot thus included 12 projects, consisting of 12 secondary and their associated primary schools with Spanish and Italian taught in just two of the projects,

French and German in the remainder. In 1993 the SOED (Circular 0113/93) proposed that all Scottish primary schools should teach a foreign language but the SOED advice for schools in 1995 limited the formal programme to P6 and P7, the last two years of primary schooling (Tierney, 1995). In addition to the National Pilot projects, there were also initiatives at local authority level 'particularly the very large Strathclyde Region scheme' (Johnstone, 1994: 11). The foreign language was to be embedded into the whole curriculum rather than be offered as a separate subject and teaching was to be shared between a visiting secondary school specialist with language expertise and the primary class teacher who 'knows the pupils' and the primary school curriculum. Class teachers were to consolidate the work of the specialist and in the event, teaching was carried out by visiting specialists from secondary schools in 11 out of the 12 projects.

#### **1.6.2.2 The Aim of the National Pilot**

In 1992 Anthony Giovanazzi, Her Majesty's Inspector for Scotland, made the following statement:

"It is a truth universally acknowledged that the earlier one starts to learn a foreign language the better. The fact that this practice is not universally followed is related not to problems of conviction, nor even of pedagogy, but to constraints imposed by the structure and the delivery of education at national and at institutional levels." (Giovanazzi, 1992: 21)

It was further stated that the overall objective of the Scottish National Pilot was 'to increase and improve practical competence in a range of languages in our future generations' and that:

"...the primary start arises from the pragmatic motivation of providing more time, as well as from the more reasoned assumption that practical language skills are best established at more receptive ages." (Giovanazzi, 1992: 24)

The aim of an early start was clearly functional; to develop communicative competence in a language or 'language learning' rather than 'language sensibilisation' or 'language awareness'. The 'language learning' rather than 'language awareness' or 'sensibilisation' stance was later endorsed by Professor Johnstone:

"National policy in Scotland has set its sight firmly against 'awareness'. I believe that this is right, since the awareness approach does not provide primary school pupils with the rich experience of the language on which their intuitive acquisition mechanisms can be fed." (Johnstone, 1994: 58)

It was further argued that both the awareness and encounter approaches, where pupils 'dip into three or four languages':

"...deny one of the most important justifications for foreign languages at primary, namely that it increases the length and amount of time available for learning the particular foreign language." (Johnstone, 1994: 58)

The 'time factor' in Foreign Languages in Primary Schools (FLPS) had also been stressed by Low et al. in the 1993 interim report on the Scottish National Pilot:

"One factor that undoubtedly counts is **time** allocated to FL learning. In school conditions, real fluency, accuracy and confidence do not grow overnight. With most pupils they take a lot of time to develop. A potential advantage of FLPS is that it offers time in addition to what is allocated in secondary schools."

(Low et al., 1993: 2)

References to children's 'receptiveness' and 'intuitive acquisition mechanisms' combined with a focus on language learning rather than language 'sensibilisation' as well as references to time thus seem to suggest a dual rationale for the National Pilot: one, to increase 'the overall time spent on learning the language' and two, to exploit the 'receptiveness' of young children.

It was later stated that the purpose of the evaluation of the National Pilot by a team from the University of Stirling was essentially to establish whether there were any 'clear gains in pupils' foreign-language competence arising from the pilot experience' and 'trying to find out whether (and if so, why and how) the time spent learning a foreign language at primary school made a difference' (Johnstone et al., 1996: 61/2) as 'the initial years were intended as a period of exploration that would lead in due course to a more explicit rationale' (Johnstone et al., 1996: 60). Earlier it had been stated that although certain terms were absent from the SOED's aims for the evaluation such as attitude, motivation, language awareness and cultural awareness, these were not to be

ignored in the evaluation at least as 'possible factors connected to foreign-language attainment' (Johnstone, 1991: 37). The first evaluation of the National Pilot thus stated that an early start can bring added value:

"...by offering an opportunity to promote not only positive attitudes to language learning, when children are still at a highly formative, impressionable age, but also intuitive, experiential forms of learning based on the kinds of project-work, creative activity, song, dance, drama and practical tasks that children regularly perform nowadays in Scottish primary school classrooms." (Low et al., 1993: 2)

However, it is very likely, judging from the above quotes, that 'the opportunity to promote positive attitudes' was not an original rationale for an early start but rather a 'post-rationalisation'. The 'time factor' as a justification for an early start will be discussed further in Chapter Two within the contexts of the origins of the belief that younger is better and in Chapter Three in the context of the evaluation of the Scottish National Pilot. Whether an early start in a foreign language per se promotes positive attitudes towards foreign language learning will also be discussed in more detail as will outcomes from the Scottish National Pilot.

## **1.7 European Projects**

Increased interest in early foreign language learning is not limited to Britain alone, however, and early language learning schemes have also been introduced in a number of European countries, in Greece from the age of nine, in Italy from seven, in France from seven and in Portugal and Spain from eight, for example, (see Johnstone, 1994, for a description of some of the European

initiatives) generally with the overarching aim of developing communicative competence in a language. In the majority of cases, this means English. Hawkins already pointed out in 1981 that most nations can safely predict that English will be at least one of the languages children will need as adults and just how 'functional' the choice of English is can be seen across Europe where parents are increasingly pressing for English to be taught at primary school rather than other languages and where according to statistics released in Brussels 'English is the most commonly taught language' (The Guardian, 13 February 1998: 4). Statistics published by the Berlin schools authority in 1998 showed that out of 550 schools introducing a foreign language to eight year old children more than 530 opted for English ( 'Russian loses hold in east', The Times Educational Supplement, 23 October 1998: 24). The unambiguously clear choice of English as the language to be taught facilitates questions surrounding methodology, resourcing as well as teacher education for early language learning programmes. The special case of the English language in the debate on early language learning will be discussed further in later chapters in the context of learning outcomes.

## **1.8 Conclusion**

Personal involvement in European projects shows that here and abroad much consideration by policy makers and teachers alike is given to practical issues surrounding the teaching of a foreign language to young children. Contextual factors, how to bring about the practical conditions for 'success' and issues such as continuity, availability of suitably qualified teachers, topics and materials, for

example, form much of the focus of the debates. 'Unfavourable conditions' and 'obstacles to success' such as inadequate methodologies, a shortage of qualified staff and lack of continuity rather than age are generally regarded as the causes for lack of progress and achievement. While the focus of the debate continues around perceived 'obstacles to success' the dictum that younger is better remains largely unchallenged.

As has been stated in the introduction, there is much pressure on the current Government to introduce a foreign language into the primary school curriculum. At such a time it would seem important to investigate whether the commonly held belief that 'younger is better' can stand up to close scrutiny for all young learners in all contexts. Chapter Two will place the belief that 'younger is better' into its historical and theoretical context and examine the literature on age in second language development.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Catching them Young - The Origins of the Belief that Younger is Better**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter examines the origins of the belief that 'younger is better' for language learning. It investigates the literature on age in language learning and examines whether the evidence supports the commonly held view that 'younger is better' for second language learning, especially the learning of a foreign language in the classroom.

#### **2.2 The Origins of the Belief that Younger is Better**

A number of arguments have been put forward in support of the belief that younger is better for language learning. Neurological explanations based on the plasticity and flexibility of the child's brain and hemispheric specialisation, cognitive explanations, social and affective arguments based on the assumption that adolescents and adults might be more inhibited, might have negative attitudes towards the target language and culture and might perceive acculturation as a threat to their identity established in their first language, and the argument of total exposure time. Carroll's suggestion (1969, 1975) that the amount of teaching time provided was the most important factor in attainment has led to the conclusion that, as it takes a long time to learn a language well, the sooner learning begins the better.



Some of the arguments in support of an early start appear to be more a question of methodology rather than one of a biological necessity. The neurological and biological arguments, however, seemed to have been the most influential. They will therefore be discussed in greater detail while the cognitive, the affective argument and the argument of exposure time will be followed up at the end of the chapter.

### **2.2.1 Neurological Arguments - The Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH)**

Few would deny that young children are efficient first language acquirers. After all, virtually all children, under normal circumstances, achieve comparable spoken competence in their first language by the time they reach school age and most children seem to do this with relative ease and effortlessly irrespective of their background.

Theories on how exactly children acquire their first language differ in how they view the process of first language acquisition itself, in the relative importance they assign to the role of nature and innate linguistic capacities and to the role of nurture and the social environment. Chomsky (1965) postulated an innate 'Language Acquisition Device' (LAD) and Universal Grammar distinct from other cognitive abilities to account for a largely effortless and uniform process while Lenneberg (1967) postulated a 'critical period hypothesis' (CPH) which claimed a critical time for language learning and a 'biological clock' running out around puberty.

Already in the late 14th and early 15th century the Dutch humanist Erasmus advocated the early immersion of children in the Latin language and Locke in the 17th century suggested that French should be 'talked into the child'. However, the claim that effortless language acquisition would be unlikely, if not entirely impossible, after a certain period in life was brought to prominence in the 1950s with the work of Penfield & Roberts. Based on processes in brain maturation, neurosurgeons Penfield & Roberts (1959) and Penfield (1965) proposed a critical time for language development after which language acquisition would be difficult, if not impossible and that the best time to begin a second language was therefore early in childhood. Much of the evidence came from studies on aphasia where they found that after damage to the left hemisphere of the brain, speech was most speedily recovered by children. Greater plasticity of the child's brain was said to make this possible while after the age of nine 'the human brain becomes progressively stiff and rigid'. Penfield took this claim further and argued that the greater plasticity of the child's brain would allow the child to learn two languages as easily as one:

"The units of one or more second languages should be given to the child when he is young and his brain is plastic and ready for the direct method of learning...There is a time to start language learning. It is early in the first decade. The biological clock of the human brain cannot be altered by the educator to suit the convenience of a high school curriculum." (Penfield quoted by Jeanes in: Libbish B., 1964: 35)

Penfield suggested that languages should therefore be taught from an early age by 'the direct method that mothers use' as a so-called 'switch mechanism'

would allow the child to switch from one language to another without 'confusion, without translation, without a mother tongue accent'.

The concept of a critical period for language learning was further developed by Lenneberg (1967) in his 'critical period hypothesis' (CPH). In his studies on cerebral injuries and the lateralisation of brain functions he found that unlike children, adults could not transfer language functions between the two brain hemispheres. Lenneberg linked the completion of brain lateralisation to the onset of puberty which marked the end of the 'critical period' for language learning. Like Penfield's work, Lenneberg's work was also carried out in the context of first language acquisition and like Penfield, he subsequently claimed a 'biological clock' and a critical period for the learning of a second language:

"... automatic acquisition from mere exposure to a given language seems to disappear after this age, and foreign languages have to be taught and learned through a conscious and labored effort." (Lenneberg, 1967: 176).

Although he recognised that 'most individuals of average intelligence are able to learn a second language after the beginning of their second decade', he argued that:

"...the incidence of "language learning blocks" rapidly increases after puberty and foreign accents cannot easily be overcome." (Lenneberg, 1967: 176).

In other words, while language acquisition outside the critical period might not be entirely impossible, it would be qualitatively different, less natural and less

successful, as the neurological capacity for language reception and production changed from childhood to adulthood. Evidence of recovery from brain damage and from studies of deaf children seem to confirm a critical period for first language acquisition. Studies in sign language (Newport, 1990), for example, provided evidence that the sign language of those children who were exposed to it from birth was grammatically accurate whereas the language of those who had started to learn to sign later in life displayed a number of ungrammatical forms.

As McLaughlin (1984) stated, one inference frequently drawn from the critical period hypothesis is the assumption that younger is better for learning a second language. Andersson (1969, 1973), for example, argued that the individual was biologically programmed to acquire a language before puberty, that optimal language processing was only available to children and that post-puberty acquisition would be qualitatively different. Children, he argued, acquired languages more quickly and more easily than adults and foreign languages should therefore be taught in the elementary school.

However, the relevance of Penfield's and Lenneberg's studies for the learning of a second language is questionable. Jakobovits (1970) argued that Penfield's claims needed to be interpreted within the context of Canada where, at the time, early bilingual education was a matter of great public and political interest. As Penfield himself admitted, his suggestion that children should be taught from an early age by the 'direct method that mothers use' was influenced by his

observations of immigrants entering Canada who, as children, seemed to acquire the target language effortlessly. His comments quite clearly ignored crucial contextual differences and display a confusion between the processes involved in the acquisition of a first language, in acquiring a second language in naturalistic environments and the learning of a foreign language in the classroom. In any case, as Harley pointed out, the ability of the damaged brain to regain lost or disrupted language:

"...is not necessarily related to the ability of the healthy brain to acquire a new L2." (Harley, 1986: 5)

Lenneberg's timing of the process of lateralization was also questioned by Krashen (1973) who suggested that lateralization might be completed by the age of four or five. Since much language learning takes place after that age the relationship between a critical period and lateralization remains questionable:

"The evidence, then, appears to call for a revision of the critical period hypothesis as originally put forth. If its biological basis is the lateralization of language function, then the critical period for language development would seem to occur between the ages of 2 and 4 or 5. A great deal of syntax is acquired during this time span but ...by no means all syntax. Nor is phonological or semantic development complete by the age of 4 or 5. To assert that the child acquires language during this period of time seems to be too strong a claim." (McLaughlin, 1984: 48)

The essential question that remains for second language learning then is 'whether a general "matrix for language skills" which Lenneberg suggested was

established during first language acquisition, survives into later life or whether this capacity itself is subject to a critical period' (Bialystok & Hakuta, 1994: 79).

### **2.2.2 Chomsky's Theory of First Language Development**

Lenneberg's theory on first language acquisition, his Critical Period Hypothesis and Chomsky's theory of an innate language faculty distinct from other cognitive abilities, a Language Acquisition Device (LAD) and Universal Grammar allowing the child to acquire his first language largely effortlessly (Chomsky, 1965: 30-37) have had a profound influence on the belief that 'younger is better' for all language learning. Chomsky stated that his theory on first language development might be of little relevance to second language learning and teaching:

"I am frankly rather sceptical about the significance for the teaching of languages of such insights and understanding as have been attained in linguistics and psychology." (Chomsky, 1966, quoted in Hawkins, 1981: 179)

Nevertheless, his theory greatly influenced both the belief that 'younger is better' for second language learning as well as second language learning theories and methodologies in general. The following pages briefly present the origin of Chomsky's theory of first language development. The likely role and influence of the environment and of social interactions on language development is also briefly discussed. It will be argued that while both innate factors and environmental variables would seem to be responsible, the nature/nurture debate is far from concluded and that, depending on which

aspect of language development is under discussion, environmental factors might play qualitatively and quantitatively different roles. Phonological development, for example, might proceed with minimum exposure to language data and is likely to be completed by a certain age, whereas lexical development will depend much more on the quality and quantity of language input and, rather than being submitted to maturational constraints, is a lifelong process and a prerequisite for lifelong learning and concept development.

In a Chomskyan sense 'knowledge of language' represents 'knowledge of grammar' comprising phonology, morphology and syntax. The gap between available language data and eventual 'knowledge' or 'competence', the question of how children come to know what they know, presents 'the logical problem of language acquisition' (Hornstein & Lightfoot, 1981). The question of 'how it was possible for children, on the basis of insufficient evidence about or severely limited experience of their language, to acquire the complex and rich system that represents their knowledge of language' was the starting point of Chomsky's inquiry. In his response to Skinner's 'Verbal Behavior' (1957) Chomsky (1959) argued that behaviorist views of language learning as a process of habit formation through stimulus, response and positive reinforcement could not explain the fact that most children, irrespective of background, intelligence or exposure to language go through similar phonological and syntactical stages in their first language development and achieve comparable spoken competence by the time they reach school age. First language acquisition cannot simply be a response to external stimuli but

children had to be biologically predisposed to acquire language. Chomsky's 'nativist' theory of first language acquisition (1965) postulates the existence of a domain-specific innate language faculty, a Language Acquisition Device (LAD) and specific procedures for the construction of a grammar. Chomsky's theory was underpinned by two major considerations, the poverty of the stimulus and the degeneracy of the stimulus. The child knows aspects of language or grammar which he could not have derived from the evidence available. What the stimulus to which the child is exposed lacks but which nevertheless forms part of the child's eventual knowledge of language, Chomsky argued, must therefore be produced by the organism from its inner resources. The language faculty must account for those aspects of knowledge of language for which there is no evidence in the data available to the child:

"A consideration of the character of the grammar that is acquired, the degenerate quality and narrowly limited extent of the available data, the striking uniformity of the resulting grammars, and their independence of intelligence, motivation and emotional state, over wide ranges of variation, leave little hope that much of the structure of language can be learned by an organism initially uninformed as to its general character " (Chomsky, 1965: 58)

The degeneracy of the stimulus argument is based on the fact that speech does not generally consist of complete and grammatically well-formed sentences. Children are frequently exposed to imperfect linguistic data but nevertheless manage to separate the underlying rules of the language from those aspects which are inessential or even misleading:



"A record of natural speech will show numerous false starts, deviations from rules, changes of plan in mid-course, and so on." (Chomsky, 1965: 40)

The 'initial state' of the language faculty, according to Chomsky (1981), consists of Universal Grammar (UG) a set of innate general organisational principles of grammar common to all languages and of open parameters associated with these principles. The principles of an innate Universal Grammar enable the child to acquire a language during the process of normal maturation. While maturation of the language faculty follows a genetically ordered and timed course, children apply innate knowledge of grammatical principles and fix the open parameters to attain a mental grammar of the particular language to which they are exposed:

"The genetically determined fundamental principles provide for the 'plasticity' to acquire any one of a wide diversity of languages; the open parameters make it possible to acquire a specific language on the basis of limited linguistic experience." (Botha, 1991: 34)

Implementation of a principle may vary from language to language but each implementation of a principle or setting of a parameter will determine specific aspects of the grammar of a language.

### **2.2.3 Language Development, Interaction and the Environment**

An acceptance of the theory that children learn a language because it is their biological destiny to do so, however, does not deny the relative importance of the environment for at least some aspects of language development and

successful first language development, like any other complex human behaviour, is likely to be dependent on both innate and environmental factors. Chomsky himself accepted both innate and experiential components in language acquisition and argued that language resulted 'from the interaction between an organism's experience and the organism's method of dealing with the experience' (Chomsky, 1980).

### **2.2.3.1 Interactionist Dimensions**

An interactionist perspective of language development recognises that children are born into a social world and making sense of this world occurs through interaction with other people. Language develops as a result of a complex interplay between innate factors and the child's social environment where language data activate and unfold the genetic programme. Bruner (1967, 1981) claimed that the LAD needed the support of a Language Acquisition Support System (LASS) and that the child needed to interact with other people for language development to proceed.

Locke (1993) emphasised the social-interactional aspect as well as the role of affect and attachment in first language development. He argued that affective relationships between child and caretaker were the major driving force and that 'attachment was a powerful enabling construct that conspires with other factors to set language development in motion' (Locke, 1993: 107). For Locke communication is maintained through emotional ties and affective and social relationships are 'the context for communication and thus the context within

which linguistic communication develops' (Locke, 1993: 104). Social interactions move the child along the 'path to spoken language' and language development would not proceed apace unless:

"...infants enjoy the kind of success in vocal communication that is enabled by cognitive, social and motoric developments of one kind or another." (Locke, 1993: 6)

The infant is not simply exposed to language but experiences language through interaction with other people. Language development is thus characterised by an interplay between innate factors and the environment. Innate factors affect the child's environment while the child's socio-cultural environment itself activates innate mechanisms. Data from the child's linguistic environment trigger the various parts of the innate programme at different points in time while at the same time 'shaping' the development of the language faculty.

For Locke, the child is not simply a passive recipient of language data but plays an active role in the process by encouraging his environment into providing relevant stimuli. Through his own behaviour the child 'prompts and configures much of the physical, social and vocal information that is used to construct a linguistic system'. The 'executive control' over language acquisition, he argued, is likely to reside within the child, the 'programme host' as 'entrusting overall control to the environment would jeopardise language development'. Locke's interactionist perspective on first language development suggests that innate

mechanisms alone cannot explain the total process of first language development and that social interactions and affective variables play a role.

### **2.2.3.2 Environmentalist Perspectives**

The effects of environmental factors on language development were examined by Wells (1981, 1985). In the 'Bristol Language Project' Wells studied first language development amongst a group of children born in Bristol in the late 60s and early 70s and found that there were significant differences in the rate of language development between these children. The results of this study suggested that while the environment might not affect the route of development, both the quality and quantity of the social and linguistic interactions a child experiences seem to affect the rate of development. Wells (1985: 3) concluded that differences between children depended largely on the quality of a child's conversational experiences with adults. More specifically, faster progress made by some children seemed to be related to 'the number of direct requests for control made by the parent' and the 'proportion of extended utterances'. High quality time between adult and child, exposure to books and language play and games were regarded as key factors in the rate of first language development. In follow-up research to the Bristol Project, Skehan (1988) suggested that first language development, especially development in the use of auxiliary verbs, influences later foreign language development. Family background might therefore be a reliable predictor in children's ability to deal with literacy related language activities at schools. This research will be referred to in more detail in Chapter Four.

An acceptance of the importance of the environment in the rate of first language development does not, however, disprove Chomsky's theory of first language acquisition and the existence of genetically determined stages in first language development. A valid theory of the total process of first language development is thus likely to include innate, behaviorist and interactionist components.

Imitation and repetition are likely to have their place while interactions with other speakers allow the child to 'learn' the social aspects of language, conversational conventions and appropriate use of language. These 'components' of language development quite clearly have implications for second language teaching methodologies. In any case, the debate on the balance of innate and environmental factors, the importance of individual components and the role of the child in language development is far from concluded, possibly precisely because of all the potential educational and political implications should the scales be tipped in favour of the one or the other.

#### **2.2.4 Critical Periods in First Language Acquisition**

It has already been stated that in a Chomskyan sense, 'knowing' a language means 'knowing' the grammar of a language, its phonology, its morphology and its syntax and it is for these aspects of language that, as Chomsky argued, innate principles of language mature into such knowledge under the influence of linguistic experience. It is for these aspects of language that critical or sensitive periods exist in the 'child's path to spoken language' (Locke, 1992). Children do grow up in very different environments but these leave the onset of language development relatively unaffected (Lenneberg, 1967: 35) and while the rate of

development might vary between individual children as studies by Wells (1981, 1985) had shown, the route would seem to remain largely the same. Language structures and patterns are developed in an orderly and systematic way with an identifiable sequence of stages or 'speech milestones' (Brown, 1973). All children, whatever their background, seem to progress through the same initial stages in their language development. By the age of six months most children 'coo' and 'babble' and by the age of ten months most use single words such as 'mama' and 'dada'. Children start to produce sequences of sounds and they start using more words (although research on 'variability' suggests that there might be some individual differences with some children using language chunks early in their development). By the age of 4 most children have mastered the phonological system of their first language. By the age of 5 they have acquired most morphological and syntactical rules of their language used in speech although they are likely to continue to learn more complex or cognitively demanding structures such as the passive form (see Chomsky, C., 1969). Children are also likely to have some notion of sociolinguistic rules as manifested in their changing roles and voices during play. Linguistic stages linked to approximate ages would therefore seem relevant for those aspects of spoken first language development which are dependent on innate factors. Other aspects of language development, such as lexical development, would seem to depend much more on the environment and first language skills such as reading and writing need to be taught and therefore treated differently.

## 2.3 Catching them Young

Influenced by Brown's work (1973) on the acquisition order of morphemes, Dulay & Burt (1973, 1974, 1976) and Hakuta (1974, 1978) investigated the acquisition of English morphemes by second language learners. Hakuta studying a Japanese girl acquiring English and Dulay & Burt studying Chinese- and Spanish-speaking children acquiring English as a second language in the United States found that all the children acquired a set of English morphemes in an order similar to the order in which English native-speaking children acquire these morphemes. Dulay & Burt concluded that if children acquired a second language in the same order as native-speakers do, the same underlying mechanisms had to be at play and the acquisition of a second language had to be similar to that of a first language. The result of their studies was the 'L1=L2' hypothesis which postulated that similar universal language processing strategies underlied both first and second language acquisition. A 'creative construction process' in second language acquisition was claimed to allow children to :

"...gradually reconstruct rules for the speech that they hear, guided by innate mechanisms which cause them to use certain strategies to organize that linguistic input, until the mismatch between the language system they are exposed to and what they produce is resolved." (Dulay & Burt, 1976: 75)

An invariant order of acquisition was proposed which was not affected by instruction or by interference from first language syntactic patterns and it was claimed that:

"...at least for child second language learners first language transfer/interference was unimportant in the acquisition of syntax."  
(Hatch, 1978a: 39)

The 'L1=L2' hypothesis had a profound influence not only on starting age but also on teaching methodology. Claims were made that, at least for children, language instruction and the teaching of syntax was not necessary and that one should 'leave the learning to the children' (Dulay & Burt, 1973: 257). All that would be needed for successful second language acquisition and learning was to replicate the conditions of first language development:

"Teaching a new language means creating for students a part or all of their new language environment." (Dulay, Burt & Krashen, 1982: 13/14)

However, not all morpheme studies have shown the same conclusive results. Larsen-Freeman (1975) found that accuracy orders varied with tasks and asked for caution in claiming an invariant acquisition order for second languages. Wode (1978) claimed that the results of his studies suggested that while a second language might be acquired in a certain developmental sequence, first language and second language acquisition sequences for a particular language might still be different. Wode also claimed that all children learning a second language relied on prior knowledge of their first language. The claims made by the early morpheme studies have also been challenged by Hatch (1978) who suggested that in carrying out these studies morphemes which should have been separated were grouped together, such as definite and indefinite articles,



for example, where later studies by Ringboem (1987) quite clearly showed interference from the learner's first language. Bailey, Madden & Krashen (1974) suggested similar morpheme acquisition routes for children and adults thus providing little evidence that adults processed linguistic data differently to children. Krashen concluded that there was no fundamental change at puberty in the process of acquisition but that 'affective' factors were responsible for any differences in outcomes (Krashen, 1980, 1981, 1982). 'Affective' explanations for possible child/adult differences in second language development will be discussed later in the chapter.

Some morpheme studies suggest that the route of second language development is not affected by age but provide little information about the rate or the eventual level of success and, as Hatch claims, in formal and instructed 'learning' situations the relevance of a 'natural order' remains questionable:

"The order of acquisition of syntactic structures may be based on input, on frequency, on numbers of forms to be sorted out, grammatical complexity, semantic weight, perceptual saliency, or even pronunciation problems with consonant clusters. How far and how fast the learner progresses may be much more related to instruction, learner interest in the finer points of syntax, and innumerable personal variables." (Hatch, 1978a: 66)

Ellis (1985: 245) suggests that 'it is necessary to separate out the effects that formal instruction has on the route of Second Language Acquisition and on the rate/success of SLA'.

However, if one accepts the relevance of a Universal Grammar for second language learning and if it should be the case that universal language learning principles influence certain aspects of language development, such as morphology and syntax for example, then the question arises whether:

"...the innate principles in question remain available throughout life and are operative during second language acquisition. If they do remain available, it follows that the parts of second language grammatical development which they inform ought not to be affected by the age factor, whatever may be the situation in relation to other aspects." (Singleton, 1995: 6)

However, as Singleton argued, the question whether innate principles remain available is not an easy one to settle as illustrated by Bley-Vroman who updated his original Fundamental Difference Hypothesis (1989) which claimed that adults have no access to universal language learning principles to a more modified version (1994) in which he hypothesised that while UG is not available to the post-puberty learner the late learner can nevertheless derive language principles from other cognitive sources.

In a strong 'no access' viewpoint Long (1990, 1993) claimed that children 'win out' in second language development not just quantitatively but also qualitatively and that only child starters were capable of attaining native-like second language abilities:

"The evidence here is clearest for phonology but also exists for accent recognition, listening comprehension and syntax, with suggestive similar findings for collocation, discourse and pragmatics." (Long, 1990: 166)

Whether the evidence supports such a strong claim will be the focus of the following pages. As has been stated, during first language development children proceed through a number of developmental stages each characterised by a critical or sensitive period beyond which development, while not completely impossible, is at least deemed to be qualitatively different. Whether critical periods and a so-called 'biological clock' do indeed exist in the context of second language development will be the subject of the following discussions.

### **2.3.1 A Critical Period in Second Language Development?**

The literature on the age factor in language learning has produced much ambiguous data with arguments put forward both in support of the notion that 'younger is better' as well as against and thus hard to reconcile. Conflicting and controversial research results would seem to leave many researchers 'in a state of baffled agnosticism' (Singleton, 1989: 46). A critical survey of the literature on age in second language development will form the focus of the rest of this chapter. At the start it seems important to suggest that much of this state of 'baffled agnosticism' is created by a lack of precision and clarification in the use of concepts such as 'acquisition' and 'learning' or 'puberty' and 'adolescence', with the first a biological intrapersonal concept and the second more a social interpersonal one. The literature also seems to display a degree of imprecision in the formation of questions. What exactly does younger or older mean? What does good, better or worse mean? If 'younger is better' then what is it better for? Is faster necessarily better? Is slower necessarily worse?

Does 'different' necessarily mean worse? And what does it mean to have near-native like or native-like competence?

Adding to this confusion in the use of terminology and question formation is the fact that research findings from one context are often uncritically transferred to a different context without taking into account context-specific variables or 'without regard to their particular conditions of validity' (Widdowson, 1990: 26). Many of the studies on age in language learning were carried out in a first or second language acquisition context and a major part of the literature on age assumes a second language environment. Findings from these contexts are often transferred to the learning of a foreign language in the classroom where quite clearly different variables are at play and where, as Hatch (1978b) pointed out, the application of results from second language acquisition research often involves 'leaps in logic'. On the other hand, 'extremist' and 'exclusive' views have often led to what might be valuable and relevant findings from second language acquisition research being ignored in discussions of classroom foreign language learning (Lightbown, 1985). Any discussion of the age factor in language learning, however, which does not take context-specific variables into account is likely to be of little value:

"Generalizations about the optimum age that fail to take context into account are almost certain to be false." (Jakobovits, 1970: 74)

This study is concerned with the formal learning of a foreign language within the artificial constraints of the classroom, a learning environment where context-specific variables are crucial. Nevertheless, it has become necessary 'to sift through the body of research and theory in second language acquisition in order to identify what might be relevant to language pedagogy' and to establish 'the pedagogical utility of research carried out by Universal Grammar inspired second language acquisition researchers' (Ellis, 1997b: 73). A review of the literature thus seems to suggest that some of the most considerable 'leaps in logic' were made in the area of young children learning second languages.

Setting aside for the moment the validity of the goal of 'native-speaker likeness' for all second language learning, an attempt will be made to establish, from the available literature, whether native-speaker like competence is indeed possible if the learning of a second language starts after puberty or whether, as Long (1990) for example claimed, the acquisition of linguistic abilities in a second language is successful during sensitive periods but irregular and incomplete after these. In other words, do critical (or sensitive) periods and maturational constraints exist beyond which the 'learning' of a language becomes, if not impossible, at least problematic, and if they do exist, do they exist for all aspects of language? Evidence from the literature will be examined that could support the belief that 'younger is better' for learning a second language, particularly a foreign language in the classroom. Within this debate, a distinction between contexts in terms of who learns which language and

where, why and under what circumstances will become crucial. It is for this reason that outcomes from two large-scale projects carried out in the specific context of the English-speaking UK, the Pilot Scheme and the Scottish National Pilot, will be discussed separately in Chapter Three.

In examining more closely the literature on age, it became necessary to keep in mind what it means to 'know a language'. Ellis (1990: 57) states that there is no consensus regarding what the term 'knowledge' of an L2 means. It has already been stated that in a Chomskyan sense 'knowledge' of language refers to knowledge of phonology, morphology and syntax of a language. A native-speaker's total knowledge of a language, however, reaches beyond a narrow Chomskyan interpretation and includes, phonology, morphology, syntax, lexis, semantics, discourse and pragmatics and, for literate societies, reading and writing skills. These different aspects of language competence are of course rarely possible to teach in isolation in a classroom. However, separating them is crucial to producing a theoretical definition of 'knowing a language' and, for the purpose of this study, becomes necessary for the evaluation of the influence of maturational constraints and 'critical periods' on language learning.

The following pages will analyse the literature on the age factor in language learning and an attempt will be made to establish whether native-speaker competence in the areas of phonology, syntax and lexis and pragmatics is possible if that language has been acquired or learned after puberty. The concluding sections will discuss affective considerations in second language

learning and the issue of exposure time. It is hoped that some light will be shed on Hatch's (1983) statement that 'research findings do not exclusively support the notion that younger is necessarily better nor do they support the opposite view'.

### **2.3.2 Maturational Constraints and Phonological Development**

As second language speakers who started learning a second language at an older age generally speak with a 'non-native' accent, much of the research into the age factor in language learning has focused on the aspect of phonological development. Scovel (1969, 1988) related Lenneberg's theory on lateralization at puberty to evidence of puberty as the time when foreign accents appear and argued that it was biologically impossible to speak a second language without an accent if it was acquired after that time. It is still a widely held belief that if a second language is acquired or learned after puberty, native-like pronunciation is impossible due to biological factors. Indeed, some of the least controversial data on the effect of age on language learning seem to result from phonological studies where the concept of a 'biological clock' and a 'critical or sensitive period' appears to be most relevant. The bulk of the evidence seems to suggest the existence of a critical period for the acquisition of native-speaker-like pronunciation and intonation in a second language.

Data from second language acquisition research (Asher & Garcia 1969, Ekstrand 1976, Fathman 1975, Oyama 1976, Snow & Hoefnagel-Höhle 1978, Tahta, Wood & Loewenthal 1981a and 1981b, Snow 1987, Flege 1987)

suggest that age-related constraints exist in the area of phonology and that most young children are able to achieve native-like standards of pronunciation while puberty marks the end of the capacity for accent-free speech. The following pages will investigate some of these studies with the discussion of studies from the classroom to follow.

Asher & Garcia (1969), Oyama (1976), Tahta et al. (1981) and Snow & Hoefnagel-Höhle (1978) all reported a positive correlation between age of arrival in a country and degree of 'foreign accent' suggesting that age of entry into a country rather than length of stay is related to successful acquisition of the phonological system of a second language. Asher & Garcia (1969) studied the acquisition of English by Spanish-speaking Cubans and found that those who had entered the USA between the ages of one and six achieved better standards in pronunciation than those who arrived between the ages of 7 and 11 while those who arrived after the age of 13 showed the weakest performance. The subjects in this study read aloud four sentences in English which were tape-recorded and subsequently judged by English native-speakers. While none of the immigrants were rated as having native accents those with an age of arrival of one to 6 years performed best. Of those immigrants with an arrival age of between 13 and 19 more than half were judged to have a definite foreign accent. However, while about 2/3 of the Cubans who had come to the United States aged six or under acquired near-native standards of pronunciation, none of them acquired complete nativeness as judged by native speakers while a number of older children seemed to have done so.



Fathman (1975) studied 200 children aged between 6 and 15 learning English in America and found that 6-10 year-old learners did better in the acquisition of the phonological system than older children and Flege (1987) found that Spanish speaking children tended to produce the English /t/ sound with native-speaking properties whereas older speakers of Spanish found native-like production of this sound problematic.

Oyama (1976) studied the acquisition of English accents by a group of 60 Italian immigrants into the USA with arrival ages of between six and 20 years and different lengths of stay in the USA. He also found that age of arrival was a strong predictor of degree of accent and that the effect of age was independent of length of stay. Younger children acquired native-like accents whereas children older than 12 did not.

Snow & Hoefnagel-Höhle (1978) studied the acquisition of Dutch by English native-speakers aged five to adults living in the Netherlands. They found only small differences between the age groups in the rate of acquisition of the phonological system of the Dutch language. Measuring discrimination of Dutch speech sounds, they found that by nine to twelve months after their first exposure to Dutch, those with the best pronunciation scores also did best on a discrimination test of Dutch phonemic contrasts that do not occur in the English language such as /uy/ and /x/. Discrimination performance improved up to adolescence when 'the incidence of errors started to increase'.

Snow concluded that evidence on the acquisition of accents 'may be the best (if not the only) evidence of a sensitive period for language'.

Contradictory evidence, however, suggesting that adults and adolescents perform better than children was produced by Olson & Samules (1973), Ervin-Tripp (1974) Neufeld (1979), Snow (1987), Bongaerts, Planken & Schils (1995) and Bongaerts, van Summeren, Planken & Schils (1997).

Ervin-Tripp (1974) studied the acquisition of French by 31 English-speaking American children aged four to nine living in Geneva, Switzerland. The children were from socially advantaged, professional backgrounds and received their education through the medium of French. She found that the older children acquired the phonological system faster than the younger children, a finding consistent with the study by Olson & Samuels (1973). Snow (1987) suggested that acquisition of the Dutch phonological system outside the critical period, especially after phonological training, was indeed possible while an earlier study by Neufeld (1979) and a more recent study by Bongaerts, Planken & Schils (1995) also provide data in support of successful acquisition of the phonological system of a second language outside the critical period. In Neufeld's laboratory study twenty Canadian university students received 18 hours intensive tuition in Chinese and Japanese phonology and were tested in their ability to repeat sentences in each language. About half the subjects were rated as native-speakers of Japanese and just under half as native speakers of Chinese leading Neufeld to the conclusion that phonological native-speaker competence is achievable at least by some adult learners.

However, Neufeld's study was criticised by Long (1990) for the shortness of its speech samples and the 'representativeness' of its subjects who were all English/French 'bilinguals'. Gass & Selinker (1994) commented on the 'language-like' behaviour of adults who do well on specific tasks but might do 'less well' in maintaining native-like accents over a period of time or in 'everyday encounters' as:

"...the ability of older learners to quickly learn phonology, especially suprasegmental phonology, seems to atrophy rather quickly."  
(Gass & Selinker, 1994: 240)

Bongaerts et al. (1995: 36) suggested that Neufeld's study might have simply demonstrated that 'some adults have not lost the ability to imitate unfamiliar sound patterns'. While one has to accept the critique, these studies nevertheless challenge the notion of a critical period for the acquisition of the phonological system of a language as a 'biological necessity'. In their own more recent study Bongaerts, Planken & Schils (1995) found that Dutch learners of English who started to learn English at the end of the critical period (around the age of 12) could, with phonological training, still obtain standards in pronunciation 'indistinguishable' from native -speakers. The subjects in this study were ten adults aged between 23 and 52 who had started to learn English around the age of twelve and who were either studying or teaching English at a Dutch university. Subjects performed four different speaking tasks ranging from reading aloud single words to talking for three minutes about a topic.

Tape-recordings of speech samples were judged by native-speakers of English who 'regarded the native-speakers of English in the control group and the highly successful learners of English as members of the same population'. The group of excellent learners of English was not outperformed by the group of native-speakers on any of the tasks (Bongaerts, Planken & Schils, 1995: 43). Bongaerts et al. concluded that 'instruction in the pronunciation of a second language does make a difference'. With training both in the perception and production of a phonological system some learners seem to be able to achieve native-like competence.

Martohardjono & Flynn suggested that one area of language development that was not affected by a critical period were the 'biologically determined sensory abilities for the development of sound' (Martohardjono & Flynn, 1995: 135). Fundamental competence in the area of speech cognition seems to remain accessible to the adult learner and the ability to perceive novel contrasts does not seem to disappear with age. The acquisition of some aspects of phonology might be a question of a 'biological capacity' whereas other aspects, such as the 'fine-tuning of accent', might be 'data-driven'. Martohardjono & Flynn also proposed that this would have obvious implications for the teaching of a foreign language in the classroom and the teacher as a role model.

### **2.3.2.1 Phonological Development in the Classroom**

One of the earliest studies on the acquisition of a sound system in the classroom by Dunkel & Pillet (1957) provided some evidence that younger is

also better in a school context. Following two years of 15-20 minutes of French each day, third and fourth graders in America were judged by teachers to have better pronunciation and intonation standards than the older children leading Dunkel & Pillet to the conclusion that achievements in pronunciation was 'the most rewarding aspect of the elementary school programme'.

Tahta, Wood & Loewenthal (1981b) studied the ability of 5 to 15 year old monolingual English school children to imitate French and Armenian phonological patterns and found that where the acquisition of the second language had begun before the age of six, speech production was accent-free. When acquisition began between the ages of 7 and 11, speech was generally accent-free whereas after the age of 12 accents were rather marked. However, this study also suggested that age-related changes in the ability to replicate foreign language sounds may differ for intonation and pronunciation:

"For pronunciation, there is a slight uneven but basically steady linear decline over the whole age-range studied (5-15). For intonation there is a marked and rapid drop from 8-11, with 5-8 year olds showing comparable, good abilities to replicate intonation, and 11-15 showing comparable, poor abilities to do so, though with a slight superiority of the older subjects in this age range. It is, however, worth stressing that all the adolescents (and younger children) *could* replicate foreign intonation adequately, given a sufficient amount of exposure and practice, and given that they had nothing else to concentrate on." (Tahta, Wood & Loewenthal, 1981b: 367)

However, other studies have produced some contradictory evidence. Olson & Samuels (1973) investigated, under laboratory conditions, the ability of three

different age groups (9.5 to 10.5, 14 to 15 and 18 to 26), elementary, junior high and college students, to imitate the German sound system. Over three weeks subjects received 10 sessions of 15 - 25 minutes of pre-taped instruction on German phoneme pronunciation. Olson & Samuels found that:

"Contrary to common belief, on the post-test the junior high and college groups were significantly better at pronunciation than the elementary group."  
(Olson & Samuels, 1973: 263)

Ekstrand (1976) studied the learning of English by Swedish primary school children aged 8 to 11. He found that during 18 months of tuition older children consistently outperformed the younger ones in areas of pronunciation. He also found, however, that younger immigrant children in Sweden performed better than older children. These controversial findings, younger children seem to do better in a target language environment while older children seem to do better in the classroom, suggest that the acquisition of the phonological system of a language within a school context might well be a different matter altogether than the acquisition of that system in the target culture.

Under classroom conditions not all children achieve native-like accents, as Jakobovits (1970) and Swain (1981) had already argued and as personal practical experience has shown to be the case, especially in the multilingual classroom where a high number of language pairs are present. Within the classroom a number of variables take on importance, such as the language learned, motivation and attitude towards that language as well as the teacher as

a role model. 'Flawed' pronunciation might also be the result of peer pressure, with some children mocking those who try to sound 'native-like'. These issues will be followed up in later chapters on learning a foreign language in the classroom.

### **2.3.2.2 Summary of the Findings on Maturational Constraints on Phonological Development**

Most of the research evidence seems to suggest that innate mechanisms and maturational constraints affect the acquisition of the phonological system of a language at least for the majority of learners. Nevertheless, as some 'late' second language learners can 'pass as native-speakers' it might be better to replace the term 'critical period', which claims that it is impossible to speak without accents if the second language is learned beyond the onset of puberty, with the term 'sensitive period' which does not exclude this possibility (Bongaerts, Planken & Schils, 1995: 45). Conflicting data from second language acquisition and foreign language classrooms suggest that the acquisition of a phonological system of a second language in the classroom depends on more than innate language learning mechanisms. Olson & Samuels (1973: 267) suggested that the common observation that children acquire better pronunciation than adults may have an environmental or sociological explanation as children have wider access to peers and other 'good models' than adults. Explanations for 'success' or 'failure' in natural or formal contexts might be affective, how much the learner identifies with the target language, as much as biological. Pronunciation might be more difficult to

acquire 'because it runs deeper into the centre of the student's personality than any other aspects of language' (Stevick, 1976: 64). In any case, as Singleton (1995) argued, the success of all the exceptional older learners suggests that most studies show 'a tendency rather than an absolute rule'.

### **2.3.3 Maturational Constraints and the Acquisition of Syntax and Morphology**

While there might be near consensus on pre-puberty being the best time for native-like acquisition of pronunciation in a target language environment, the question of maturational constraints in the acquisition of the syntax and morphology of a second language is far more complex.

A number of studies carried out into the acquisition of syntax and morphology of a second language have produced much controversial data (Scovel 1969, Ervin-Tripp 1974, Oller & Nagato 1974, Fathman 1975, Ramirez & Politzer 1978, Snow & Hoefnagel-Höhle 1978, Neufeld 1979, Krashen, Long & Scarcella 1979, Patkowski 1980, Johnson & Newport 1989, Ioup, Boustagui, Tigi & Moselle 1994, Ioup 1995, Martohardjono & Flynn 1995, Radnai 1996). Several point to the superiority of the older learner in the area of syntactical and morphological development and the adolescent generally seems to perform better than both the adult or the younger child.

Scovel (1969) who had claimed a critical period for the acquisition of a native-like accent in a second language nevertheless hypothesized that it was



possible for the post-puberty learner to become 'fluent in syntax and vocabulary' (1981: 37). Ervin -Tripp (1974) found that even in a naturalistic environment where children heard the target language for most of the day and were educated through that target language, the older children performed better in the acquisition of syntax and morphology than the younger children. She found that 'in every respect in the age range of four to nine the older children had an advantage and learned faster' due to more efficient memory and better problem solving abilities. In a study referred to earlier, Fathman (1975) examined the rate of acquisition and order of acquisition of English grammatical structures amongst 200 children aged 6 to 15 learning English in American public schools. She found that the older children aged 11 to 15 scored higher on morphology and syntax tests than the 6 to 10 year olds and no major differences were observed in the order of acquisition of structures by children of different ages.

Ramirez & Politzer (1978) investigated the progress of a group of Spanish-speaking children from kindergarten age to 13 to 17 year old adolescents through comprehension and imitation tasks of a variety of English structures. They found that the adolescents performed better than the younger children and that 'the older children reached in approximately half a year the level of the third graders who had started English at kindergarten' (Ramirez & Politzer, 1978: 331). Patkowski (1980) studied the syntactical proficiency in English of 67 immigrants who had arrived in the USA at different ages and had stayed for different lengths of time but for a minimum of five years. Transcribed speech was judged for its grammaticality by native-speakers who gave higher

ratings to those children who had started to acquire English before the age of 15 than to those who started after the age of 15. Patkowski hypothesised that full native-like acquisition of syntax, indistinguishable from the native-speaker, in both production and comprehension would only be possible before the age of 15. He found that age of arrival was the strongest predictor of eventual achievement. The earlier the children had arrived, the higher their syntactic proficiency in the long run. Patkowski suggested that there were age-related limitations in people's ability to acquire full command of the syntactical system of a second language and that the best age for acquisition was between 12 and 15. An alternative explanation for the superiority of the pre-puberty acquirers was offered by McLaughlin (1984) who argued that 'younger arrivals might simply be more motivated'. In any case, as McLaughlin also pointed out:

"Even the study by Patkowski does not provide unequivocal evidence that younger children (below 12) ultimately learn a second language better than those who start at an older age (beyond 12)." (McLaughlin, 1984: 56)

A study by Johnson & Newport (1989) seemed to confirm the findings by Patkowski. They evaluated the judgement of grammaticality of sentences by Chinese and Korean speakers at university in America and found that age of arrival was a predictor of success. Those who had arrived before puberty did better in the acquisition of syntax than those who arrived after and those who had arrived between three and fifteen did better than those who had arrived between the ages of 17 and 39. A study mentioned earlier by Snow & Hoefnagel-Höhle (1978) found that children aged between 12 and 15 acquired

morphological and syntactical rules of the Dutch language more quickly than the younger age groups and made the fastest progress between test intervals. The subjects in this study, English native-speaking families who had moved to Holland, were tested several times during a year and Snow & Hoefnagel-Höhle found that in the first few months after arrival both the adults and adolescents had achieved better grammatical competence than the children. After twelve months the 12-15 year olds maintained an advantage over the younger children aged 6-10 and the under fives continued to lag behind.

Krashen, Long & Scarcella (1979) concluded that if time and exposure were held constant, research results suggest that in the area of morphological and syntactical development adults proceed faster than children, older children proceed faster than younger children and that all studies:

"...had failed to find a superiority for the younger child with respect to rate of acquisition." (Krashen, Long & Scarcella, 1979: 581)

However, Krashen & Terrell also suggested that if rate and ultimate attainment are distinguished, child starters in natural contexts outperform adult starters in the long run:

"Rather, children are "better" with respect to **ultimate attainment**; over the long run, those who start second languages as children will usually reach higher levels of competence than those who start as adults (i.e. after age 15). Over the short run, however, adults are **faster** in attaining second language proficiency than younger children." (Krashen & Terrell, 1988: 45)

The concepts of 'rate' and 'ultimate attainment', however, are crucial issues in learning a foreign language in the classroom and will be followed up again later in the chapter.

In any case, the view that adults cannot under any circumstances achieve native-like grammatical competence in a second language has recently been challenged by Ioup et al. (1994). They re-examined the critical period hypothesis in a case study of two adults and found that both were capable of achieving native-like competence in Arabic, one achieving native-like fluency in a natural 'Krashen' acquisition context, the other in a more formal environment. It must be added though, that Julie, who acquired Arabic in a 'natural' environment, did receive explanations and explicit error correction from family members and also kept a 'learning' diary. One could therefore argue that she also received a degree of formal instruction. Nevertheless, the research by Ioup et al. suggests that adults can indeed manage to acquire a second language to near-native standards and questions the general relevance of a critical period for the acquisition of the syntax of a second language.

Martohardjono & Flynn (1995) report investigating whether native-speakers of Chinese who learned English after the age of 15 'know that questioning a noun inside a relative clause is ungrammatical in English even though allowed in Chinese'. Since such knowledge is provided by Universal Grammar, the Critical Period Hypothesis would predict that Chinese speakers learning English after puberty would not recognise ungrammatical sentences:

"Under a Critical Period Hypothesis for principles and parameters, parameter-values that have not been set during L1 acquisition would no longer be available after a certain age." (Martohadjono & Flynn, 1995: 141).

Martohadjono & Flynn concluded that the results of their study suggest that UG remains accessible to adult learners and that:

"...UG principles which are not instantiated in the L1 remain available to adult L2 learners, strongly suggesting that UG is not affected by a critical period." (Martohadjono & Flynn, 1995: 141)

### **2.3.3.1 Learning the Syntactical System in the Classroom**

A limited number of studies from the foreign language classroom also suggest that older children are the more efficient learners. One of the earliest studies, Dunkel & Pillet (1957) suggested that on the FLES programme the older children outperformed the younger children in syntactical development. Oller & Nagato (1974) tested English syntactic and lexical competence of groups of Japanese girls some with early language experience and some without and found that there was no significant difference in performance between those with 6 years of FLES and those without. They regarded their findings as evidence that older beginners learn as much in one year as younger learners learn in 5. They found that an early start did not bring any substantial long-term benefits, however, as in the Pilot Scheme, the potential influence of integrating early with later starters could not be established. The issue of mixing children with varying experience will be taken up again in later chapters.

A more recent study carried out amongst primary school children learning English in Hungary (Radnai, 1996) suggested that the test performances of 11-12 year old children were better than those of the 8-9 year olds in both grammatical correctness as well as 'structural completeness' of utterances and in tasks at both word and sentence level. As was stated earlier, findings on syntactical development from the Pilot Scheme and from the Scottish National Pilot will be discussed separately in Chapter Three.

### **2.3.3.2 Summary on Syntactical Development**

The bulk of the literature seems to suggest that 'older' is 'better' at least in the sense of 'faster' in second language syntactical development. Ellis (1994: 492) suggests that the critical period for grammar might be later than for pronunciation and that 'some adults may succeed in acquiring native levels of grammatical accuracy in speech and writing and even full linguistic competence'. Bialystok & Hakuta (1994) conclude that:

"...it does not appear to be the case that adults lose the ability to learn abstract aspects of language; rather, the amazing human ability to learn grammar remains with us as long as we remain human. There is hope, at least with regard to grammar." (Bialystok & Hakuta, 1994: 75)

A number of questions around how it might be possible for post-puberty learners to achieve native-like competence in any or all aspects of a second language, will be addressed later in the chapter.

#### **2.3.4 Maturational Constraints and Lexical Development**

Chomsky's Universal Grammar did not concern itself directly with the acquisition of vocabulary. However, vocabulary is a crucial aspect of language knowledge and vocabulary knowledge is fundamental in developing competence in a language. Nevertheless, findings in this domain of language are very limited probably due to the fact that it is difficult to define what exactly it is that constitutes the lexicon. Lewis (1993), for example, adopts the view of Pawley & Syder (1983) of lexis as both words and chunks or semi-lexicalised sentences. Structure, in this view, is regarded as secondary, based on the assumption that lexis can carry meaning without structure. For Lewis (1993: vi) language consists of 'grammatical lexis and not lexicalised grammar'. However, as Singleton argues, 'a partitioning-off of lexis from grammar is less than straightforward' and:

"...actually defining the domain of the lexicon - and in particular defining the line of demarcation between lexis and morphosyntax - is no easy matter."  
(Singleton, 1995: 10)

Interestingly, most studies in the area of lexical development seem to come from the foreign language classroom, presumably as input is easier to control and output more easily measured at least in contexts where learners do not receive additional exposure to the target language outside the classroom.

In an already cited study Ekstrand (1976) showed adults and adolescent beginners progressing more rapidly than younger children in acquiring

vocabulary and older children progressing more rapidly than younger children. Snow, Hoefnagel & Höhle (1978) found that adolescents made the fastest progress in the acquisition of vocabulary. A study carried out by Singleton in 1993 (reported in Singleton, 1995) into the learning of French by English speakers found that those who started before the age of 12 did not do better than those who started after the age of 12 despite the extra exposure time, a finding which would support the suggestion that younger is not necessarily better for lexical development in formal contexts. Nor is it necessarily the case that the younger learner is the more efficient in this aspect of language development. Krashen & Terrell (1988: 156) report that children participating in 'Natural Approach' activities could acquire about 15-25 new lexical items per hour for recognition purposes while adults could acquire up to 50 words per hour, although, as Krashen & Terrell suggest, figures could vary depending on language pairs and the motivation of the learners involved. As in other language areas results are therefore not all conclusive.

Singleton (1995) refers to one of his own studies which seems to indicate that 'a subsample containing some very early beginners is exhibiting a degree of second language lexical proficiency which significantly surpasses that of a subsample of subjects who started the second language at the age of 12'. How much of the inferior performance of the older learners in this study could be attributed to any age related maturational factors and how much to other cognitive or affective factors, however, might be difficult to establish.



Martohadjono & Flynn (1995: 138) argue that the acquisition of the lexicon of a language may involve inductive procedures and may therefore be dependent on cognitive faculties rather than a language faculty. In any case, the capacity to acquire or learn the lexicon of a language does not seem to disappear with age. A study by Service & Craik, for example, (referred to in Singleton, 1995) showed that older learners were quite capable of learning new words and that items of vocabulary can be learned and stored in both a first and second language. There is little evidence therefore that:

"... the capacity to acquire new vocabulary disappears at any particular maturational point, or that it necessarily becomes radically impaired even in old age." (Singleton, 1995: 20)

Indeed it has already been argued that the acquisition of lexis is a lifelong and necessary process without which any socialisation process would be seriously inhibited.

In the area of lexical development, as in other areas, older learners seem to be faster, but younger acquirers are likely to catch up, at least in naturalistic environments. As has already been stated the concepts of 'total exposure time' and 'ultimate attainment' are crucial in discussions of the classroom context, especially in the UK context. While the younger starters might well overtake the post-puberty starters in a natural second language acquisition environment purely as a result of amount of exposure, the same is not necessarily the case in the foreign language classroom.

In evaluating lexical development, both in and outside the classroom, it would seem important to take into consideration what it means to 'know' a word. Word 'knowledge' ranges from recognising a word to producing it in a variety of contexts, understanding a range of meanings as well as collocations and vocabulary might be known in one sense but not another. Harley (1996), in her introduction to Volume 53 of the Canadian Modern Language Review devoted entirely to the theme of vocabulary learning, makes the important point that there are degrees or aspects of word knowledge and that even native-speakers differ in the words they 'know':

"...in terms of their formal properties, their range of meanings and the relationships they enter into with other words." (Harley, 1996: 3)

The second or foreign language learner, just like the child acquiring his first language, needs to learn more than the literal meaning of words. He needs to learn their syntactical properties, how words behave in sentences and their collocations, for example. Initially the foreign language learner might only know the core or most common meaning of a word but moving beyond the core meaning of a word and being able to understand and use words across contexts would seem more difficult within the constraints of the classroom. The relationship between lexis and schematic knowledge and the link between grammar and lexis with contextual factors would also seem an important consideration. 'Knowing' a word would very much depend on the learner's world knowledge. It would also seem to be important to add that in any evaluation of word 'knowledge' or lexical development performance and

observational behaviour might be unreliable indicators of underlying competence as words would seem more easily forgotten or temporarily unavailable for recall than structural items.

The question of language pairs also seems important as cross-linguistic similarities seem to facilitate the learning of the lexicon of a second language at least in the initial and receptive stages. Ringboem (1987) referred to work by Palmberg (1985) who studied the extent to which Finland-Swedish 10-year olds were able to understand spoken English words before they even started to learn English at school. Palmberg showed that receptive mastery of a word was frequently achieved without a great amount of conscious effort. Children listed that they had learned words from the television, listening to music at home and from friends and travelling. Similar points will appear in later discussions of the special case of English and the objective evaluation of learning outcomes.

### **2.3.5 Maturational Constraints and the Development of Discourse and Pragmatics**

Chomsky's theory on first language development did not concern itself with the use of grammatical knowledge in actual everyday language use. Discourse competence and pragmatic knowledge, learning how to use language appropriately in a wide variety of contexts, however, is part of communicative competence and thus an aspect of the overall task facing the language learner:

"...a normal child acquires knowledge of sentences not only as grammatical, but also as appropriate. He or she acquires competence as to when to speak, when not and as to what to talk about with whom, when, where, in what manner." (Hymes, 1972: 227)

People's knowledge and use of language, conscious or subconscious, within a social context comprises grammatical forms and semantic concepts but also an understanding of the purpose of the language in use and a knowledge of what to say to whom and how. As Cook argued, whether a stretch of discourse makes sense has to do with 'our knowledge of the world and where the events take place':

"...we employ knowledge - of the world, of the speaker, of social convention, of what is going on around us as we read or listen - in order to make sense of the language we are encountering." (Cook, 1989: 9)

For successful communication both are needed, knowledge of the formal properties of language as well as knowledge of the social and psychological context of communication. In fact, it is often a lack of native-like discourse and pragmatic skills that make language performance difficult for the foreign language learner once he leaves the classroom and enters the target language community. While functions such as apologising and refusing are universal, they are nevertheless embedded in a cultural context and are carried out differently from language to language. There are differences within a particular society as Bialystok & Hakuta point out:

"Discourse is not a single, generic, homogeneous event throughout society. Within a society different discourses exist, both among members within of [sic] the same social group as well as among different social groups...even the same individual engages in a variety of different discourses."

(Bialystok & Hakuta, 1994: 185)

The child acquiring his first language in the target culture acquires spoken discourse competence through experience, by observing people in communicative and social interactions and through interacting with other native-speakers. Children find out how language acts are performed, what conversations sound like and the rules which govern behaviour like turn-taking and this process of learning to use language appropriately in different contexts is lifelong:

"This process of learning to use language appropriately continues throughout life, developing as new situations and new sociolinguistic demands are encountered." (Holmes, 1978: 134)

In the context of second language acquisition research Ellis (1997a) suggests that studies investigating learner discourse show that:

"...the acquisition of discourse rules, like the acquisition of grammatical rules, is systematic, reflecting both distinct types of errors and developmental sequences." (Ellis, 1997a: 44)

An experimental study by Scarcella & Higa (1982) showed that adolescent learners coped better in natural conversations than younger children and that

adolescent learners took a much more active role in sustaining a conversation through the application of strategies such as active negotiation, repetition, topic change and use of conversation fillers. This study suggests that discourse strategies are rarely used by child second language learners and are more likely to be employed by adolescents and that older learners are therefore more able to tailor input to their needs. Krashen et al. (1982) suggest that older learners, as they are better at keeping a conversation going, might learn faster than younger learners.

This is not to argue that young children do not have discourse skills in their first language as they quite clearly do. However, negotiating meaning, for example, within the context of first language development would seem a different issue to negotiating meaning within the artificial constraints of the classroom and with limited systemic as well as schematic knowledge. The issue of young children 'learning' discourse skills in the foreign language classroom will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Three. In any case, studies suggest that there are no maturational constraints on either the acquisition or the learning of such skills:

"...the fine points of speech act behaviour, such as (a) types of intensification and downgrading, (b) subtle differences between speech act strategy realizations, and (c) consideration of situational features, could be taught in the foreign language classroom." (Cohen, 1996: 262)

The following paragraphs will discuss cognitive and affective factors as well as the question of quantity and quality of learning time before addressing some unanswered questions and problem areas.

## **2.4 Cognitive Explanations**

Rosansky (1975) and Felix (1985) have hypothesised Piaget's cognitive stage of 'formal operations' as the close for a critical period for second language acquisition. Rosansky (1975) hypothesised that Piaget's stage of 'formal operations', the onset of abstract thinking and the awareness of differences adversely affected second language acquisition by blocking the natural acquisition path. Whereas the pre-puberty child acquired a second language subconsciously and naturally, unaware that he was involved with another language, the adult perceived the second language as 'a problem to be solved using his hypothetico-deductive logic' (Rosansky, 1975: 98). The ability to think in abstract terms therefore came at the expense of access to Universal Grammar and innate learning mechanisms. Rosansky also suggested that the post-puberty learner was hindered by strong attitudes towards the target language thus suffering from a double handicap, a conscious awareness about language as well as preconceived social attitudes. Children on the other hand would be at an advantage by not having either the affective or the cognitive 'barriers'.

Felix (1985) hypothesised that innate 'language-specific' cognitive structures (LSC-structures) are complemented with the onset of formal operations by 'problem-solving' cognitive structures (PSC-structures) and claimed that the more the 'problem-solving' cognitive structures shape the learning process at the expense of the 'language-specific' cognitive structures, the less likely it was that the learner would achieve native-like mastery of the second language.

Adults are said to find it more difficult to suppress the problem-solving mechanisms. Both Felix and Rosansky suggest that the pre- and post-puberty learner may apply different processes in acquiring a second language but Rosansky suggests that the outcomes might not necessarily be different.

## **2.5 Affective Considerations**

### **2.5.1 Affective and Social Considerations**

Krashen & Terrell (1988) claimed that there was no fundamental change in the language acquisition process at puberty and that the ability to acquire language 'naturally' did not disappear. 'Affective' factors were held responsible for any differences in attainment between pre-and post-puberty learners. The filter hypothesis claims that:

"...no real change in the language acquisition device occurs at puberty. The LAD does not shut off, nor does it even 'degenerate'. Rather, the necessary input may be kept out." (Krashen, 1982: 216)

Krashen & Terrell state that the 'filter' explanation of child/adult differences in second language acquisition is related to the Monitor model (Krashen, 1977) and the distinction between natural acquisition and conscious learning. With the stage of formal operations the adolescent gains the Monitor, the ability to examine language input consciously and adjust language output. However, self-consciousness in adolescence leads to an overfocus on rules at the expense of natural processes. Krashen hypothesised that formal operations resulted in personality changes at puberty and that the self-conscious adolescent builds up an 'affective filter' which blocks 'natural' language



acquisition. Children on the other hand, were said to have a very low affective filter; this facilitated language acquisition and resulted in the child's eventual superiority in second language acquisition:

"The child's eventual superiority in second language acquisition is hypothesized to be due to affective factors. Specifically, we hypothesize that the affective filter increases in strength around puberty."

(Krashen & Terrell, 1988: 46)

According to Krashen & Terrell affective variables have two effects on second language acquisition:

"...people with the "right" attitudes (high motivation, self confidence, low anxiety) will be more prone to interaction and thus get more input, and will also have a lower affective filter: They will let the input "in" for further language acquisition." (Krashen & Terrell, 1988: 46)

Adolescence, the time when children become more self-centred is supposedly the time when the affective filter increases in strength and may thus be the turning point for ultimate success in second language acquisition:

"...the necessary input is often blocked and therefore is less available for acquisition." (Krashen & Terrell, 1988: 47)

Based on the work by Elkind (1981) Krashen suggests that with formal operations the adolescent gains a greater ability to conceptualize the thoughts of others and that this capacity 'is the crux of adolescent egocentrism'.

The adolescent 'fails to differentiate between the objects towards which the thoughts of others are directed and those which are the focus of his own concern' and becomes preoccupied with his appearance and behavior. This is said to lead to increased self-consciousness, feelings of vulnerability and a lower self-image:

"In our terms it leads to the increased affective filter and a subsequently lowered ability to acquire a second language." (Krashen, 1981: 169)

Krashen & Terrell further claim that while affective variables do have an effect on second language acquisition before puberty, they do not seem to be strong enough to limit ultimate attainment in children:

"...given sufficient exposure, most children reach native-like levels of competence in second languages." (Krashen & Terrell, 1988: 47)

However, one cannot conclude that simply 'lowering affective filters' and providing children with 'comprehensible input' (Krashen, 1981: 8) will lead to better results without taking methodological considerations into account in the classroom. The importance of 'comprehensible language output' in successful language development was emphasised by Swain (1985, 1995) as it provides 'the opportunity for meaningful use of one's linguistic resources' (Swain, 1985: 248). It will later be suggested that 'comprehensible language output' can be absent in the primary classroom, sometimes as a result of assumed 'sound' pedagogical approaches. It will also be argued in Chapter Four that within the

constraints of the classroom, consciousness, greater cognitive and conceptual maturity, a degree of analytical ability and an awareness of language as a system are important substrates for successful learning. Whether presumed affective advantages of children necessarily disappear with adolescence remains questionable. The large and increasing number of adults signed up for foreign language courses seems to suggest that this might not necessarily be the case.

### **2.5.2 Empathy and Acculturation**

A positive attitude towards the target culture and being able to empathise with the speakers of the target language are considered vital ingredients in successful second language learning:

"...the successful learner of a second language must be psychologically prepared to adopt various aspects of behavior which characterize members of another linguistic-cultural group." (Gardner & Lambert, 1972: 3)

Affective and social explanations why younger should be better than older in this respect were put forward by Taylor (1974), Schumann (1975, 1978) and Brown (1980).

"...Whereas child language acquisition seems to be a means toward an end -socialization-...lack of such motivation in adults and the absence of a positive attitude toward language learning and the target language and culture may be responsible for the lack of success in most adult second language learning." (Taylor, 1974: 33)

Schumann (1975, 1978) hypothesised that affective variables such as the ability to empathise, to 'place and modify one's behaviour in the direction of the other person' (Schumann, 1978: 170) and ego-permeability were as important or even more important than neurological maturational arguments in explaining differences between children and adults in second language acquisition. In this respect children were said to be at an advantage over adults in whom:

"...the development of firm ego boundaries, attitudes and motivational orientations which is concomitant with social and psychological maturation places constraints on the initiating factors..." (Schumann, 1975: 232)

In adults affective variables are thus claimed to block or inhibit cognitive processes from operating on the available target language input. Schumann's 'acculturation theory' emphasised successful integration into the target culture as an important factor in second language acquisition. His theory was based on the case study of a 33-year old Costa Rican male acquiring English in the USA and who 'pidginized' at a very early stage as he 'kept a social distance' and 'failed to acculturate and adapt to the target culture'. This led Schumann to the conclusion that 'the learner will only acquire the second language to the degree that he acculturates' (Schumann, 1978: 29). Children, for both social and psychological reasons, are said to be more open to both language and culture as they do not see a new language as a threat to their identity. Along similar lines, around the argument of 'culture shock', Brown (1980) suggested four stages of acculturation through which the second language learner proceeds. The successful second language learner was said to

experience initial excitement followed by an experience of culture shock from which he recovers gradually and then adapts into the new culture. Children are said to be at an advantage as they do not experience this initial culture shock, move through the various stages more quickly and adapt more easily and fully than adults, especially if they also attend school in the target language country where the target language is the medium for instruction. Adults, on the other hand, are said not to achieve native-speaker competence as they do not develop the necessary motivation for successful integration.

It is likely that in natural language acquisition contexts children will have certain social and affective advantages over older learners and will adjust to a new culture more easily than adults. Accepting and adjusting to a new culture and communicating and socialising with peers is very important for the child who lives in that culture:

"Enormous peer pressure is brought to bear on the child to learn the new language so that he can fit in and be accepted by his new playmates."  
(Smythe, Stennet & Gardner, 1975: 17)

As far as being able to adjust easily to a new culture is concerned, younger might well generally be 'better' but affective characteristics vary from individual to individual and not all children integrate easily as Wong-Fillmore (1976, 1979) has shown. More importantly, however, there is little evidence in the literature on second language learning that would suggest that empathy and being able to adjust is either a necessary or a sufficient prerequisite for successful second

language learning (see Naiman et al., 1978) and Schumann's theory is not supported by much of the research on age which has shown that young children are not the more efficient learners. The link between being able to empathise and to acculturate and learning a language successfully therefore remains questionable. The relative importance of empathy in learning a foreign language successfully in the classroom will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Four.

### **2.5.3 Natural Characteristics**

Young children are said to be generally curious, responsive, receptive, uninhibited, spontaneous, flexible and open-minded. These natural characteristics are assumed to stand them in good stead in the acquisition of a second language. Whether young children tend to display the same natural characteristics in a formal learning context at school will be followed up in later chapters within the context of the two case studies.

## **2.6 Quantity and Quality of Exposure Time**

A number of the studies discussed earlier suggested that 'older is faster but younger is better in the long run' simply because it leads to increased total exposure time. As it takes a long time to learn a language successfully, it would seem desirable that children should start learning early. Carroll (1969, 1975) and Burstall (1978) claimed that the amount of learning time spent rather than age was the crucial factor in determining achievement in formal settings:

"...the amount of competence one achieves is largely a matter of time spent in learning, rather than the actual age of starting." (Carroll, in Stern, 1963: 63)

Burstall et al. (1974) claimed that the available evidence suggested that achievement in a foreign language was primarily a function of the amount of time spent learning the language but that achievement:

*"...is also affected by the age of the learner, older learners tending to be more efficient than younger ones."* (Burstall et al., 1974: 123)

Total exposure time and 'ultimate attainment' have implications for the classroom, however. If younger is to be better in the long run in the context of the classroom, children would first of all have to continue with the same language over a long period of time. Singleton (1989: 236) estimates that more than 18 years in a school setting would be needed to obtain an amount of language input equal to that in a second language environment and for any initial advantages of older learners to disappear. By such calculations a child who starts to learn a foreign language at the age of six would have to continue learning the same foreign language up to the age of 24. Acquiring the same language over such a period of time is likely in a natural context and also in the context of English as a second or foreign language. It is much less likely in the context of children learning a foreign language in the English classroom, as experience has shown over and over again.

Even if exposure time as a variable were to be held constant, the quality of the input over a period of time in a second language acquisition environment cannot easily be compared with the quality of the input in a classroom simply because of differences in the quality of the interactions that might take place. Macnamara (1973) stressed the importance of 'real communication' with speakers of the target language in successful second language development and Wagner-Gough & Hatch (1975) suggested that the frequency of forms in the input and their 'semantic power' will determine what the learner acquires regardless of age. The need for meaningful and genuine communication or 'speech acts' in the target language is often absent from the foreign language classroom, however, especially in the British primary school where teachers, even native-speakers, usually share the English language with the children.

### **2.6.1 Language Status**

Learning time would seem to be closely linked to socio-cultural and affective variables notably the status and relevance of the languages involved.

As Dodson (1993) suggested, it is the value society puts on languages, the way they are taught and learnt, and the self-image the child develops in the process of learning two languages that are important. Lambert (1961, reported in Hamers & Blanc, 1989) emphasised the importance of language status in explaining divergence in research findings on successful second language development. 'Additive' bilingualism and greater cognitive growth were said to result in cases where two high-status languages and cultures made a positive contribution to the child's development whereas 'subtractive' bilingualism



resulted where one of the languages was perceived as 'inferior'. In such a case, the child's intellectual growth and personal development were said to be adversely affected. Even in the 'high-status' bilingual context of Canada, however, the rate of attrition amongst pupils on French Immersion Programs (FIP) in British Columbia has become a major cause for concern:

"The major reasons cited by parents, teachers, and principals in transferring students from FIP are related to three major issues: academic difficulty, social and emotional difficulties and the quality of teaching and programs."

(Obadia & Theriault, 1997: 508)

Canadian principals and teachers reported that even young children dropped out of language learning programmes, that the highest drop-out rate occurred at the elementary level in grade 7 and that it was higher in early immersion programs than in late immersion programs. These high drop-out rates would seem to place doubt on the belief that younger is necessarily better even in immersion contexts. The language pupils are learning would seem to be of major importance; would attrition rates be the same if children were studying English? And what about children in British primary schools 'learning' a language which might well be of little relevance? These important questions as well as the special status of English will be discussed again in later chapters.

Quality and quantity of time spent learning as well as language status would seem to be important in determining success. In a school context, amount of learning time would have to be counterbalanced with the need for the most

efficient learning time and the question therefore arises whether time spent early is necessarily time spent best. Carroll (1975) clearly emphasised that an early start did not have any special advantages in itself and suggested that:

"If necessary, the start of instruction can be delayed more than normally if more intensive instruction is given." (Carroll, 1975: 277)

As with all other discussions around the age factor, who learns what, where and why would seem as important for bilingual and immersion contexts as for any other contexts. Before this chapter is brought to a conclusion a number of unanswered questions and problem areas will be addressed.

## **2.7 Some Unanswered Questions and Problem Areas**

A number of questions remain unanswered. If it is possible for post-puberty learners to achieve native-like competence in any or all aspects of a second language, is it because the innate language principles and mechanisms which children employ in the acquisition of their first language remain accessible after puberty and adults do have access to Universal Grammar? Is it because they employ other cognitive and general problem solving strategies instead or because they access UG but supplement it with general problem solving mechanisms as suggested by Felix (1985)? Ellis (1997a: 69) discusses a range of possibilities on access to universal language principles: 'complete' access, where learners 'switch to the parameter settings of the second language and achieve full native speaker competence, 'no' access, where Universal Grammar is not available and adult learners rely on other cognitive

and learning strategies but cannot achieve full native-speaker competence, 'partial access', where the acquisition of a second language is regulated by some innate principles and partly by general learning strategies and 'dual' access, where adults make use of both Universal Grammar and general cognitive and learning strategies but where general cognitive strategies might actually 'block' access to Universal Grammar and innate mechanisms.

According to Martohadjono & Flynn the differences between child and adult learners could at least partially be explained by 'auxiliary processes needed to map the principles of the language faculty onto the particular demands of a language and a range of language-related specific facts such as idiosyncratic rules':

"A sweeping biological explanation, we submit, fails to answer the more subtle and ultimately more interesting question of what particular aspects of linguistic behaviour are affected by age." (Martohadjono & Flynn, 1995: 151)

Is exceptional achievement limited to exceptional individuals with exceptional talent and neurological flexibility as suggested by Novoa, Fein & Obler (1988), Obler & Fein (1989) and Schneiderman & Desmarais:

"...neurocognitively flexible, talented learners have an extraordinary capacity to initiate new strategies or processing pathways when faced with novel cognitive tasks." (Schneiderman & Desmarais, 1988: 110)

How much is achievement affected by excellent general learning abilities and cognitive skills aided by motivation, positive attitudes and empathy towards the target culture? Obler & Fein (1989), for example, suggest that an exceptional IQ is not necessary for successful second language development nor is empathy required for the acquisition of native-like accents. The answers seem to remain inconclusive. It would seem likely that there is considerable difference not only between individual learners and contextual variables but also between different aspects of language. Singleton (1995) pointed out that different aspects of language are likely to be affected in different ways and argued that studies needed to distinguish between aspects of the grammar of a language on which Universal Grammar might have an influence and those aspects of grammar which are language specific and might even develop hand in hand with other aspects such as the lexicon.

Possible implications of relative language distance and language pairs are not always fully taken into account. Hawkins (1981: 79-82) reports on the work of James on the distance of English from Italian, Spanish, French, German and Russian. James suggested that for the English speaker French and Russian might be more difficult than Spanish and Italian and that 'cultural distance might be a source of greater learning difficulty than purely linguistic distance'. How can speakers of one native language acquiring or learning a second language, therefore be compared with other native speakers acquiring or learning that same language or a different one? In the study by Bongaerts, Planken & Schils (1995), for example, Dutch learners of English were compared to English

native-speakers, but a different language pair might have led to different results. Some language pairs might display lexical and structural similarities which might facilitate acquisition and learning. Bialystok and her colleagues examined the hypothesis that language learners:

"...will find it difficult to master a structure that was not a defining feature of the first language and relatively easy to master a structure shared across the two languages. These differences may be exacerbated for older learners, but there should be no age differences in the ability to learn structures that are shared across the two languages." (Bialystok, 1997: 126)

They found that the relationship between two languages was important in mastering an aspect of language structure and that where an age effect occurred it favoured older learners (Bialystok, 1997: 128). Bialystok concluded that:

"...aspects of a second language that are structurally different from that of the first language are more difficult for learners to master...this difficulty emerges for all learners irrespective of the age at which they begin to learning."  
(Bialystok, 1997: 131)

Things might well be different in the area of phonology where Flege (1987) suggested that the sounds which were most easily acquired were those which were either very similar or very different in the two languages. Ringboem (1987) studied Swedish and Finnish native speakers learning English and came to the conclusion that the children's first language mattered at least at the early stages of language comprehension, if not necessarily in production. He stated that:

"In all aspects of phonology, grammar and lexis, the existence of elements perceived to be similar to previously acquired knowledge can be assumed to have a facilitating effect on L2 comprehension." (Ringboem, 1987: 56)

Ringboem also suggested that the degree of 'difficulty' is not necessarily determined by linguistic difficulty per se but also by 'how naturally the learner can and will establish equivalence between the languages at the initial stage of learning'. Similar does therefore not always necessarily mean easy while different does not always necessarily mean difficult. Some language pairs might only display similarities in one language area and not in others and each language pair thus creates its own context and brings its own challenges in terms of universals and individual learner differences.

Studies on the age factor in language learning deal with a wide range of subjects and like cannot always be compared with like. Some studies are based on individuals while others are based on groups of various sizes. There is often little information on the background of individuals, for example their general learning ability, their first language skills and competence, their previous learning experiences, their attitudes and motivation, gender or socio-economic background. Age, as a learner variable, can therefore not easily be isolated from other variables and could easily be adduced as a reason for success or failure when in fact other factors could be the real indicators.

References to puberty and adolescence are often interchanged. Harris defines puberty as 'the transition from childhood to adulthood during which the reproductive structures mature', (Harris, 1993: G17) and adolescence as 'the period between childhood and adulthood that begins with puberty and ends with the cessation of growth' (Harris, 1993: G1). The onset of puberty is generally seen as a cut-off point, especially in the area of phonology and adolescence is said to bring about affective changes but there is clearly no straight link between puberty, adolescence and age. Lenneberg's Critical Period Hypothesis, for example, was based on the age of twelve as the onset of puberty, Patkowski had chosen the age of 15 as a cut-off point whereas Harley stated that for most theorists:

"...the cut-off point for the hypothesized critical period with respect to L2 morphology, syntax, and lexis is at or beyond puberty, or mid-teens."  
(Harley, 1986: 113)

Little information is provided on the quantity and quality of exposure to the target language other than 'several hours', 'several weeks' or 'several months'. Even where precise numbers in terms of days, weeks, months or years are given, the actual amount and type of exposure to the target language is not always easily identified. Some learners, for example, might receive additional exposure to the target language and formal teaching outside the classroom and some studies were carried out under laboratory conditions.

Who judges what and how is performance judged? In the Dunkel & Pillet study, for example, results were based on subjective judgements by the teachers themselves. Long (1993) suggests that all native-speaker judges should be monolingual since there is:

"...increasing experimental and anecdotal evidence that learning additional languages can sometimes affect first language abilities in as yet poorly understood ways, and might influence NSs' judgements of the grammaticality or acceptability of potential test items." (Long, 1993: 205)

What about accents? Are these easier to judge than syntactical attainment as Scovel (1988) suggested? Not necessarily so it would seem. In the Bongaerts, Planken & Schils study (1995) native-speaker judges from the North of England rated the Dutch foreign language learners who had been trained to speak 'Received Pronunciation English' more highly than the English native-speakers from the South of England. As McLaughlin (1984: 57) asks, what exactly does it mean 'to speak with an accent'?

What constitutes an error? Arbitrary decisions concerning correct or incorrect data often have to be made and native-speakers themselves not always come to agreement in grammatical judgement tasks. How does loss or gain in one language domain affect loss or gain in another? The question of competence and performance in a Chomskyan sense would seem to have particular relevance in the communicative classroom where language behaviour does not necessarily reflect language competence.



Tasks and test types, spoken or written, might favour learners of different ages or conceptual stages, as suggested in the Ramirez & Politzer study (1978), especially in formal settings where Tahta et al. (1981b: 366) reported that young children may be very shy.

Lastly, what exactly does it mean to have 'native-speaker competence' in a language? As Davies (1995) argued, if the native-speaker is defined as having acquired his language as a first language in a 'bio-developmental' process then native-speaker status in a second language is not possible anyhow. A removal of this criterion, however, would leave the concept of proficiency to be defined in terms of general 'native-like' competence. In any case, how important is it for the foreign language learner who has no intention or need to integrate into a target language culture to pass as a native-speaker? How necessary, and desirable for that matter, is the goal of native-speaker 'likeness' for the child native-speaker of English learning a foreign language in the classroom in England? A question which will be discussed again in later chapters.

## **2.8 Conclusion**

The literature on the age factor in language learning suggests that some post-puberty learners can indeed achieve native-speaker competence at least in some aspects of a language in both formal and informal learning situations. Selinker (1972) suggested that the number of adult immigrants into the USA who displayed native-speaker like competence in all aspects of second

language acquisition amounted to around 5%. How these learners achieve such competence, through partial or total access to universal language principles, through other general cognitive and learning resources or simply through exceptional talent remains unclear. In any case, these achievements do cast at least some doubt on the relevance of a critical period and a biological clock in all aspects of second language learning.

The notion of a critical period suggesting that 'complete' native-speaker competence, as indistinguishable from the native-speaker, would not be possible after puberty, might be better replaced by a 'sensitive' period which suggests that age limits are not absolute or immutable (Lamendella, 1977). Multiple critical periods for some aspects of language, as suggested by Walsh and Diller (1981), are the likely reality of the situation.

An optimum age for second language learning would then depend on the aspect of language under discussion. Younger might thus be 'better' in the area of phonological development where maturational constraints seem to exist at least for the majority of second language learners. If learning starts before the age of six, the child seems to have the best chance of achieving an accent-free second language. Between the age of six and puberty 'the chances of learning to speak another language without a foreign accent appear to become progressively smaller' (Bongaerts, Planken & Schils, 1995: 35). Accents before puberty seem only slight and accent-free competence is still possible if learning begins before puberty but unlikely if it begins in adolescence or in adulthood.

Bongaerts et al. also point out that these suggestions are mainly based on studies investigating the acquisition of English in predominantly naturalistic environments. The achievement in the area of phonology by the subjects in their own studies suggests 'that in some cases, at least, the biological disadvantages of a late start may be compensated for by an interaction of certain learner and context variables (Bongaerts, Planken & Schils, 1995: 44). With intensive phonological training, exposure to an input rich environment and high levels of motivation some adult learners can become indistinguishable from native-speakers. On the other hand, however, it could be argued that an early start might have eliminated the need for explicit phonological tuition and that in contexts where native-like pronunciation in two languages is desirable, such as the bilingual context of Canada or Catalonia for example, an early start might be desirable simply from a phonological point of view.

Studies are generally conclusive that in the area of morphological and syntactical development older means faster and that adolescent learners and adults outperform the younger children. In natural contexts the younger children are said to overtake eventually but the issues of speed of learning and ultimate attainment have quite different implications for the teaching of a foreign language in the classroom and will be discussed again later.

That the foreign language classroom presents its own challenges has already been stated in earlier sections. Whether one can speak of universals in a school context is questionable as it is difficult to determine how far a general

human capacity contributes to native-like pronunciation, for example, and how much can be attributed to individual differences and environmental factors. The findings from school contexts in the area of syntactical development therefore need to be taken with a degree of caution for it is likely that accurate syntactical development in the classroom is affected by age as much as by methodology and material, language input and intake, opportunities for language production as well as a host of other factors such as motivation and attitude. If it should be the case that both initial rate of acquisition and ultimate attainment depend on the age at which language learning begins, then this would require careful consideration of the time when learning is likely to be most effective and the time when learning is likely to become difficult or impossible. The evidence so far seems best summarised in the words of Singleton:

"...the available empirical evidence cannot be taken to licence the simplistic 'younger=better in all circumstances over any timescale' version of the CPH that one finds in folk wisdom..." (Singleton, 1995: 4)

He adds that 'even 'the younger=better in the long run' version of the CPH in respect of second language learning needs to be seen in the perspective of a general tendency and not as an absolute, immutable law' and that:

"Both research and the informal observations of those who are in daily contact with second- language learners suggest that an early start in a second language is neither a strictly necessary nor a universally sufficient condition for the attainment of native-like proficiency." (Singleton, 1995: 4)

In any discussion of the age factor in language learning who learns what, where, why and how is of prime importance. Chapter Three will therefore present a separate analysis of learning outcomes from primary school classrooms in Scotland and England where concepts like 'faster', 'in the long run' and 'ultimate attainment' will become crucial.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Learning Outcomes from Primary School Foreign Language Classrooms in Scotland and England**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter proposed that contextual variables are crucial in any discussions of the age factor in second language development. It was suggested that a consideration of who learns what language, where, how and for what reasons is of vital importance in evaluating learning outcomes. As the Pilot Scheme and the Scottish National Pilot originate from within the English-speaking context, the outcomes from these projects are considered of special relevance for this study and will be discussed in detail in this chapter, rather than earlier, as an inclusion of these findings into previous discussions might have led to a 'watering down' of important issues. During the first part of the chapter main findings from both the Scottish National Pilot and from the Pilot Scheme will form the focus of the debate. The second half of the chapter will address some of the controversial issues surrounding evaluations of outcomes.

In order to arrive at a clearer picture of what could be classified as tangible learning outcomes and what would appear to be largely unfounded assumptions some terminology used in publications will need to be challenged and some findings will need to be quoted verbatim from the literature. What might on the surface appear to be an overuse of quotes became therefore necessary in order to highlight apparent controversial statements. Wherever possible, an effort was made not to repeat quotes. Nevertheless, at times, a degree of repetition

became unavoidable as a separation of individual sentences within a quotation might have led to misinterpretations. The following paragraphs will briefly discuss learning outcomes from early language learning schemes in England.

### **3.2 Learning Outcomes from Classrooms in England**

Information on specific learning outcomes from early foreign language learning projects in England seems to be very limited. The 1995 CILT report did not particularly mention achievement and the author is not aware of any publications on concrete learning outcomes from those LEAs where French has been taught in Primary Schools for a number of years such as Kent, for example, which started to introduce French into the primary school curriculum in the late 1980s. One 'unnamed' Local Education Authority stated in the CILT report that, after one year, children who had learnt French at primary school were joined with children in year 8 'when it is deemed that their peers have caught up' (CILT, 1995: 8) despite the early starters having been taught in separate classes during year seven. Similar findings had been reported in the context of the Pilot Scheme where those children who had started to learn French at the age of eleven quickly caught up with those who started at the age of eight. Much anecdotal evidence from colleagues in a number of schools lends further support to these findings.

A number of likely 'spin-offs' from early foreign language learning are reported:

"The spin-offs from foreign language learning for all children are undoubtedly improved listening skills, greater awareness of language (mother tongue and foreign language), greater self-confidence and poise as individuals, improved social skills - through co-operative learning: pair work, group work, improvised drama - and greater empathy with foreign people and cultures."

(Satchwell, 1996: 169)

If one were to ask the question whether learning a foreign language, or more precisely whether aspects of learning a foreign language, can contribute to a child's cognitive, affective, personal and social development then the answer would undoubtedly be yes, learning a foreign language can have those 'spin-offs'. Singing in a foreign language, memorising and reciting rhymes and playing games, for example, can certainly have 'spin-offs' in the form of improved listening skills and social skills, at least for some children for some of the time in some contexts. It would seem important to develop these skills in children early for a number of reasons not least their transferability and value as 'life-skills'. However, one could argue that none of the above necessitates the actual teaching of a foreign language as such but could just as easily be achieved through other areas in the curriculum. 'Spin-offs' from foreign language learning can therefore not be equated with learning the language itself and whether these 'spin-offs' make young children better language learners would seem to be a different issue altogether. 'Empathy' is notoriously difficult to measure, especially in the classroom, and there is, as yet, little



evidence that children who have started to learn a foreign language at primary school show greater empathetic abilities in later life than those who have started to learn a language at ten or eleven.

### **3.3 The Scottish Evaluation of Learning Outcomes in the National Pilot**

#### **3.3.1 The Framework for the Scottish Evaluation**

The reader will remember that the National Pilot was launched in autumn 1989 initially with a cohort of pupils largely aged 11 in their last year of primary school. The SOED commissioned a research team from the University of Stirling to conduct an evaluation of the first four and a half years of the National Pilot (SOED, HMSO, J1354, 12/95).

The evaluation of the initial phase of the Pilot from 1991 -1992 was reported in Low, Duffield, Brown & Johnstone (Low et al., 1993). An evaluation of the second phase from 1993-1995 and of the entire project was reported in a final publication by Low, Brown, Johnstone & Pirrie (Low et al., 1995). The evaluation of the National Pilot had two main aims:

"One, to assess the linguistic attainments of children involved in the pilot projects, including comparison with those not involved.

Two, to evaluate the project courses including the pedagogical methods which 'enhance or inhibit the linguistic performance of the children involved'." (Low et al., 1995: 1)

More specifically, and most importantly, it was stated that achievements of early starters should be compared with that of children starting later:

"Our purpose on the other hand is to find out whether a particular cohort (FLPS) is more advanced than another cohort (non-FLPS)."  
(Johnstone, 1991: 37)

The evaluation focused on two case studies or project groups, one based on the teaching of French, the other on the teaching of German. Researchers stated that while these two groups may not have been representative, they were certainly not atypical. Data were collected through informal lesson observation as well as through the 'systematic coding of everyday classroom processes' (Johnstone, Low & Brown, 1996: 65) with additional data supplied by the teachers. Paired interview tasks with 'high', 'middle' and 'low' 'ability' pupils, where a researcher would interview two pupils for 10-15 minutes, were to provide researchers with information about spoken performance of pairs of pupils (Low et al., 1995: 176). Vocabulary retrieval tasks were also carried out in pairs of pupils who recalled words and phrases around a particular topic not necessarily as a coherent whole but also by word-association only. Interviews with teachers, teacher trainers, headteachers, advisers and inspectors were also carried out. It is important to remember in the following discussions that some classes were 'composite classes' made up of children of different ages and that P7 is the last year at primary school while S1 is the first year at secondary school.

### **3.3.2 General Findings**

Phase one of the evaluation lasted from January 1991 until the end of 1992 and preliminary findings from this initial phase were reported as 'pupils' enjoyment of learning a foreign language' and a widespread feeling that the projects were producing 'encouraging results' (Low et al., 1993). Pupils who began a foreign language at primary school seemed to have some advantage over those who had not but researchers also claimed that any definite conclusions could not be drawn:

"...informants were cautious about claiming general or lasting linguistic gains although it was widely considered that some such gains had been made."  
(Low et al., 1993: 41)

The final report (1995) is more specific about particular achievements and states that the project pupils' advantage was most evident:

"...in pronunciation, intonation, complexity of structure, ability to sustain patterns of initiation and response, and readiness to use communication strategies." (Low et al., 1995:1)

Findings reported in a later publication state that the project pupils:

"...produced somewhat larger utterances, made more use of communication strategies, showed higher levels of motivation and were more ready to initiate and answer in class." (Johnstone, 1996: 173)

The second phase of the evaluation lasted from 1993 to 1995. In this phase focus was placed on 'teaching and learning', on 'pupils' attainments' and on 'the professional development needs of teachers' (Johnstone, 1996: 173). As far as progress was concerned it was reported that:

"...pupils' performance on a common task (a conversation between a pair of pupils and a researcher) increased from P6 to P7 to Secondary 1 and to a lesser extent to Secondary 2, though the improvement was in the number rather than the range of words they were able to use, and most expressions seemed to consist of set phrases with relatively little manipulation."  
(Johnstone, 1996: 173)

The above quote is probably best read together with an earlier statement in the 1995 report that:

"The impact of the primary projects on foreign languages in the secondary schools was seen by a majority of the secondary teachers as evident in pupils' motivation, listening skills and speaking skills at S1 and S2. These gains were seen as less apparent by S3 and S4. Minorities of teachers saw gains in writing and reading and comments were made about increased confidence and readiness to participate in conversation." (Low et al., 1995: 173)

### **3.4 A Review of Evaluations of Learning Outcomes**

As the aim of the Scottish National Pilot was the development of pupils' 'communicative competence' in a particular language with 'maximum use of the target language', it was decided to evaluate the outcomes of the Pilot with reference to the same aspects of language development as the discussions in Chapter Two: phonological development, syntactic development, lexis and

discourse as well as other outcomes such as affective. The following sections will discuss findings for these different aspects of language development in more detail. However, this is by no means to suggest that the aim of communicative competence in a particular language and native-speaker 'likeness' are either necessary or desirable within the British primary school context. (The validity of such an aim at primary school was questioned by Poole, 1996b).

### **3.4.1 Phonological Development**

Issues in the area of phonological development have already been extensively discussed in Chapter Two and it would seem that it is in this area that findings are most in line with other early language learning schemes. It was reported that children in the Scottish Pilot had better pronunciation than the pupils who started at the age of 12 (Johnstone, 1996: 173). However, whether this finding applies only to those children who started at an earlier age such as eight or nine or also includes those children who started at eleven (the majority) and how it relates to composite classes, does not seem clear. Such considerations would seem important in deciding on a possible rationale and aims for an early start as well as on a starting age. The importance or 'unimportance' of native-speaker standards of pronunciation in foreign language learning will be discussed later.

It would also seem important to state that the acquisition of a phonological system of a language is only a part of the total task facing the learner and that mastering the phonological system cannot be equated with mastering the

language as such. In the context of discussions of phonological development it would seem appropriate to add that during the Pilot Scheme children's ability to respond to stimuli in French albeit with little understanding, led to widespread beliefs in the 'success' of the audio-visual method. Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) at the time commented positively on the 'fluency' and on 'the remarkable success' of audio-visual methodologies in primary schools with children becoming 'bilingual and conversant with the basic idioms' (Decreus in: Libbish, 1966: 28).

### **3.4.2 Syntactical Development and Pre-fabricated Language**

Burstall et al. (1974) reported that while the early starters made good progress in listening, imitating and building chunks of language, those children who started to learn French after the age of 11 were much better at adapting language chunks to different contexts. Low et al. (1995) and Johnstone, Low & Brown (1996) report that the majority of phrases used by pupils were pre-fabricated chunks of language:

"Emphasis on prerehearsed phrases and only rare examples of enough pupil confidence for the spontaneous generation of phrases in the FL were apparent in French and German, and no clear differences between the natures of the utterances of pupils who were continuing their primary foreign language and those who had started a second in S1 could be discerned."

(Low et al., 1995: 37)

Researchers state that an analysis of pupils' utterances showed 'a lack of evidence suggesting that they had developed an 'underlying grammatical

system that would have enabled them to manipulate language in order to produce new utterances of their own':

"There was, however, hardly any evidence to suggest that pupils were aware of one of the most basic characteristics of any language, i.e. language as a system that functions according to rules." (Low et al., 1995: 2)

The final report states several times that pupils used mainly prefabricated and memorised chunks of language and were unable to use language creatively and concludes that:

"...there appeared to be little increase in pupils' ability to manipulate language creatively in spontaneous interaction. Their output seemed to consist mainly of holophrases or prefabricated utterances, there was little general evidence of creating novel utterances..." (Low et al., 1995: 177)

Low & Wolfe (1996) discuss the impact of primary foreign languages on a secondary school in Scotland. They report that 'accuracy and the ability to manipulate the language were largely absent and there was a reluctance to remedy this on the part of the pupils' (Low & Wolfe, 1996: 36). It is further stated that:

"...pupils had a bigger collection of single words on a wider range of topics but were still unable to manipulate the foreign language; for example, although more complex structures such as the use of the third person as well as the first and second had been taught, they had not been retained by the pupils..." (Low & Wolfe, 1996: 32)

The writer finds these statements difficult to reconcile with earlier statements that one of the most evident advantages of project pupils was the 'complexity of structure' they used. Children's inability to generate utterances to match what they really wanted to say seems difficult to reconcile with praise of the early starters' use of 'complexity of structure'. This 'complexity of use' would seem memorised and rehearsed and then reproduced rather than produced.

The exact value and role of prefabricated patterns or 'lexicalised sentence stems' (Pawley & Syder, 1983), 'segments of sentences which operate in conjunction with a moveable component, such as the insertion of a noun phrase or a verb phrase' (Hakuta, 1974: 284) in both first and second language development has been much debated. Wong- Fillmore (1976) suggested that formulaic speech played a critical role in second language development amongst the children in her study who seemed to work out form and meaning of language through analysis of language chunks they had acquired early.

Krashen & Terrell (1988: 60), however, argued that while routines and patterns were helpful communication strategies they did not contribute to the development of the grammatical system of a language and were therefore essentially different from creative language use. McLaughlin (1984: 170) suggested that it is likely that the language learning process involves a 'dynamic interplay between formulaic speech and the emergent rule system'. More recently, within the context of a study which tracked the progress of a group of 11-13 year-old children learning French, 30 boys and 30 girls, Mitchell & Dickson suggested that language chunks did not seem to be 'a marginal and



transitory phenomenon' but 'played a central role in providing input for subsequent grammatical analysis and development'. They stated that over time:

"...the children's store of memorised expressions proved a valuable resource, which contributed directly to their development of grammatical control."  
(Mitchell & Dickson, 1997: 1)

Lack of creative control over language was also apparent at the beginning stages amongst older children learning French. It was reported within the context of the same study that three experienced teachers thought that after two years of learning French children 'had developed a store of rote-learned lexical items and fixed phrases, and were capable of exploiting this store in conversational contexts', however, they 'had not yet developed a creative control of syntax to any significant degree' (Mitchell & Martin, 1997: 12). However, two new entrants to the teaching profession thought that at least a 'subset of their pupils were developing some ability to manipulate elements within learned chunks' (Mitchell & Martin, 1997: 12). Yet, a small group of pupils did not appear to memorise or internalise language chunks securely. Early learned chunks disappeared quickly with these pupils and were replaced mostly by 'lexical pasting':

"These pupils make little detectable progress thereafter, and cannot be said to develop grammatical control in any meaningful sense."  
(Mitchell & Dickson, 1997: 12)

It would seem that it is at the stage of breaking chunks down into parts and analysing these that many learners encounter difficulties:

"...it is at the stage of mastering the rules that most learners fail, often after quite a promising start, when all they had to do was build a repertoire of ready-made chunks of language requiring little 'adaptation'."  
(Hawkins, 1996: 29)

Within the context of the Scottish National Pilot teachers thought that 'it was pupils' inadequate grasp of structure on entering S1 which led to statements like 'il j'aime le dessin' (Low et al., 1995: 182). However, Mitchell & Dickson make the important point that:

"...gains made by the children in underlying grammatical understanding and their growing ability to manipulate basic sentence patterns were regularly accompanied by some loss of 'accuracy' in surface details of their speech (e.g. errors in verb endings temporarily increased). This aspect of our findings confirms evidence from many other studies, suggesting that certain types of mistakes are developmentally unavoidable, as the complexities of grammar are gradually sorted out over time." (Mitchell & Dickson, 1997: 2)

Johnstone et al. also point out that research in foreign and second language learning suggests that a learner's language competence does not always develop in a 'steady and cumulative fashion':

"...it appears to be characterised by features such as variability, backsliding and fossilisation (plateau-effect) as well as by progression."  
(Johnstone, Low & Brown, 1966: 68)

One teacher in the Scottish National Pilot noted that 'many S1 pupils, after two years of the foreign language in primary, did not have a firm grasp of say the difference between *un* and *une*, and that they tended to slur over these words when speaking' (Low et al., 1995: 48). It cannot be established beyond doubt from this comment, however, whether these children were unsure of the correct gender to use or whether they had difficulties in grasping the concept of gender. As will be discussed further in the context of the two case studies, the French gender system poses a problem not just for the young learner. One teacher in the study of the 11-13 year-old children's progress in French made the salient point that pupils needed to grasp certain principles regarding the nature of language itself and in particular its arbitrary character 'if they were to grasp concepts such as grammatical gender' (Mitchell & Martin, 1997: 21). Children's general level of language awareness thus would seem to play a role as would methods. In the classroom children are likely to need help in moving beyond the use of pre-fabricated patterns and in breaking down language chunks if they are to work out the underlying language system. The important role of the written language in helping them to do so will be discussed later.

### **3.4.3 Lexical Development**

During the evaluation of the Scottish National Pilot children's lexical development was evaluated through a vocabulary retrieval task which was to:

"...access the implicit knowledge in pupils' lexical reservoirs that may not necessarily emerge during any given task of communicative performance (such as paired interview)." (Johnstone, Low & Brown, 1996: 66)

Progress in the language from one stage to another appeared to reflect an increase in *the number* of words and phrases rather than the ranges.

Pupils used more of the same from one year to another but in many cases 'without a corresponding range in verbs, articles, connectors and questions' (Low et al., 1995: 177). This was the case despite the fact that at primary school pupils had been 'exposed to a greater range of vocabulary and structure than pupils in S1 and S2 taught by the same teachers' (Scottish HMSO, J1354, 12/95: 3).

A degree of improvement in the **number** of words and phrases is to be expected after two further years of teaching simply as result of more exposure to the target language. However, simply exposing children to the target language is unlikely to be sufficient for either syntactical or lexical progression. This seems to be the case even in immersion contexts where:

"...young learners do not necessarily benefit from cognate relationships in instructional contexts where there is no particular focus on these. This suggests that instruction could be helpful." (Harley, 1996: 8)

As has already been discussed in Chapter Two, evaluating lexical development is not a straightforward matter and it would seem that the concept of 'availability' has been interpreted in its widest sense in the Scottish National Pilot. 'Knowing' a word is not simply a question of being able to recall its core meaning. Remembering a word during what appears to be a brainstorming session can not be equated with having that same word 'available' in terms of being able to

use it in different contexts, knowing its collocations and spelling. In fact, as has already been stated in earlier sections, much of the evaluation suggests that children were very much context-embedded and that 'their attempts at anything other than 'the reproduction of pre-rehearsed and prefabricated language were rare' (Low et al., 1995: 34). The reader will remember from discussions of the literature in Chapter Two that older children consistently outperformed younger children in the area of lexical development both in rate as well as in quantity.

#### **3.4.4 Development of Discourse Skills**

There seem to be some conflicting statements in the various reports with regards to the development of discourse skills. On the one hand, the 1995 final evaluation of the National Pilot states that little evidence was found of children having developed any discourse competence and that much of the initiation of topics was done by the researchers themselves:

"...in so far as we were able to monitor this, there was not much evidence from lesson observations or paired interview transcripts, of pupils developing a high level of competence in discourse. They could keep going their end of a 15-minute conversation with a researcher (in itself an achievement), but there was little evidence that they had acquired discourse skills such as 'topic initiation', 'probing', 'referring back to previous point' 'topic closure'."

(Low et al., 1995: 177)

In a later publication, on the other hand, it is claimed that 'the great majority of pupils were able to sustain an interaction with a researcher lasting roughly 15 minutes':

"The great majority of pupil pairs within the project groups (whether girls or boys, and whether categorised by their teachers as high, middle or low achievers) were able to sustain an interaction with a researcher, conducted almost exclusively in the foreign language and lasting roughly 15 minutes." (Johnstone, Low & Brown, 1996: 71)

Earlier a Scottish HMSO publication had stated that **'some'** pupils could participate in a conversation with the researcher for 15 minutes:

"Primary pupils seem to enjoy the early start to foreign language learning. They are comfortable listening to a wide range of teacher talk, participating in singing songs, playing games and listening to stories and, indeed, some could participate in a conversation with an adult (the researcher) for 15 minutes with little resort to English." (SOEID, MLPS Update, J1354, 12/95: 3)

While the final 1995 report states that project pupils were able to hold a conversation for **'some 15 minutes'**:

"There is also evidence that by the end of their primary schooling, project pupils were...able to participate in a paired conversation with a relatively unknown adult (a researcher) for some 15 minutes with little resort to English." (Low et al., 1995: 177)

As there would seem to be clear differences between 'some children being able to sustain a conversation for 15 minutes' and 'the majority of children being able to sustain a conversation for some 15 minutes', the writer finds these statements difficult to reconcile, unless, of course, they refer to different groups of children. The 1995 report states further that 'during paired interviews pupils

rarely used different forms of address', for example the polite form when conversing with an adult, despite apparently having been encouraged to make this distinction. More than half the teachers claimed that they had taught children how to begin and end a conversation and how to take turns. Yet, the report stated that pupils could not 'close a topic'. Such comments seem to beg the question of what constitutes discourse skills and a conversation in the first place and what exactly is meant by 'sustaining' an 'interaction' or 'conversation'. It would appear that the 'conversations' referred to in the various reports were largely a string of questions and answers of the stimulus-response type rather than genuine conversations as such. Ioup states that:

"What makes a series of sentences a discourse is the cohesive unity it embodies, not the juxtaposition of stock phrases and collocations."  
(Ioup, 1996: 357)

Ioup's definition of discourse, however, would shed a slightly different light on children's 'achievement'.

### **3.4.5 Performance at Standard Grade**

Children's performance at the age of 16 was one of the main issues in the Pilot Scheme. The reader will remember that by the time they were 16 those children who had started to learn French early only showed small gains in the area of listening skills. These small differences were attributed to the extra time the younger starters had spent learning French rather to any advantages of a

younger starting age per se and, according to Burstall et al. (1974) 'did not warrant the extra time spent learning'.

From Scotland it is reported that it became possible to 'track the first cohort through to their Standard Grade examinations in the 4th year (aged 16) of Secondary School' in spring 1994. Although a large number of intervening variables made it impossible to draw clear conclusions from the first national examinations it was stated that:

"...the researchers did find that the schools concerned were entering a substantially wider range of pupils than before yet were able to maintain their previous standard of attainment... This suggests that the advantage of primary school learners over secondary school beginners was being maintained up to the age of sixteen." (Johnstone, 1996: 173)

The above statement is probably best read together with a previous statement in the final 1995 report:

"Analysis of a small sample of schools, in which populations are fluctuating (mainly through parental choice of schools) and policies about presentation for Standard Grade or choice of language at S1 are subject to considerable variation, does not enable the research to state conclusively that the introduction of foreign languages into primary schooling has led to improved performance at Standard Grade." (Low et al., 1995: 143)

Low et al. continue by stating that it became clear from 'looking at the available data from a number of different perspectives' that:



"... the performance in schools was at least as good as it was before FLPS was introduced. Furthermore, this standard was being reached by a substantially wider range of pupils than before, including many who might not previously have considered taking a language at certificate level. This was consistent, therefore, with the hypothesis that experience of foreign languages in the primary schools leads to a greater proportion of the population of pupils achieving satisfactory levels in certificate awards." (Low et al., 1995: 143)

The writer fully accepts the difficulties in objectively measuring any long-term attainment due to the large number of variables involved. Nevertheless, it is questionable whether 'the hypothesis that experience of foreign languages in the primary schools leads to a greater proportion of the population of pupils achieving satisfactory levels in certificate awards' can be equated with the suggestion 'that the advantage of primary school learners over secondary school beginners was being maintained up to the age of sixteen'. Such a conclusion seems difficult to reconcile with earlier statements that 'even in those areas where there appear to be some gains such as improved listening skills or risk-taking in speaking, these are often not of a long-lasting nature and frequently diminish as children grow older'. It would appear that an alternative interpretation cannot be excluded namely that an increased number of pupils took the examination as a consequence of a 'languages for all policy' introduced during the projects, and that, by implication, an increased number of pupils might have taken the exam **without** primary school experience and that improved methodologies and attempts to meet the needs of all children could have led to similar outcomes. The maintaining of standards can therefore not

be claimed beyond doubt as the outcome of an early start. These points might seem rather petty on the surface but would appear crucial, in the writer's view, in a debate over whether an early start does make a difference to long-term attainment. Moreover, if one of the original aims of the evaluation was to compare the performance of the early starters with those children who started at secondary school, one would have expected at least a partial comparison at the age of 16. In the absence of any evidence to the contrary it would not seem unreasonable to assume that those pupils who did not start early did just as well as the early starters and that an early start did not raise average performance levels anyhow.

Additionally, from a motivational point of view rather than one of achievement, if more pupils were entered for the Standard Grade Exam than in previous years, one would expect more to continue studying a foreign language beyond the age of 16. A steady decline in the take up of foreign languages post- 16 and a loss of ground for foreign languages at 16+ by both boys and girls is a current problem in Scotland as much as in England:

"A striking similarity, however, between Scotland and the rest of the UK, is the extent of drop-out from foreign languages post-16. It is significant that Circular 11/89, making foreign language study obligatory up to sixteen in Scotland, does not seem to have arrested the incidence of drop-out post-16, when the study ceases to be compulsory." (Hawkins, 1996b: 158)

In contrast to England, however, this decline has been happening in Scotland **despite** a programme of early foreign language learning which started in 1989 and is currently in its tenth year.

Such developments would seem to support the view expressed earlier that increased numbers of pupils taking the examination might well have been the result of the languages for all policy introduced during the National Pilot rather than the outcome of increased levels of motivation and attainment due to an early start. In any case, it would have been interesting to know how many of those pupils choosing to study a language post-16 had started to learn that language at primary school.

#### **3.4.6 Learners of Different 'Abilities'**

In a Chomskyan theory of first language development and language universals the concept of ability, either high or low, clearly has no place. However, the acceptance of 'ability' or 'aptitude' in the context of foreign language learning quite clearly implies the rejection of Chomsky's theory of first language acquisition for second language learning. Both within the Pilot Scheme and the Scottish National Pilot the concept of ability recurs frequently. One of the original issues addressed in the Pilot Scheme was the question of whether there were any levels of ability below which the teaching of French was of dubious value. Burstall et al. (1974) concluded that learning French was a profitless experience for a large number of children with special needs.

From Scotland, however, it was reported that the slow learners and 'low achievers' had a particularly clear advantage:

"The advantage of primary over secondary beginners was evident across the range of abilities, and was particularly marked in the case of slower learners." (Johnstone, 1996: 173) and "A particularly clear advantage for project over non-project pupils was noted in the case of pupils identified by their teachers as being low achievers." (Low et al., 1995: 1)

However, it is not clear by what criteria a child was deemed to be a 'slow learner' or 'low achiever' and in the context of the Pilot Scheme the exact nature of children's 'special needs' was never clearly defined. In any case, the initial benefit 'particularly marked in the case of slower learners' (Johnstone, 1996: 173) did not seem to last and soon disappeared, just as had been the case in the Pilot Scheme and as personal experience has shown to be the case. Burstall et al. (1974) reported that a number of children decided that French was not for them and dropped the subject at the earliest opportunity. Within the context of a policy of foreign languages for all, such as the one in Scotland, 'dropping' a foreign language becomes more difficult. Nevertheless, five teachers from four different secondary schools in the Scottish Pilot felt that the 'lower ability' children, especially, were demotivated early on and that the effects of having started early were most evident in S3 and S4. More specifically teachers stated that:

"The ability level peaks earlier."

"Lower ability pupils become saturated before the end of S4."

"Lower ability pupils are soon demoralised, by the time they get to S4 they've had enough."

"Possibly a lack of interest develops among weaker pupils after 3/4 years of the FL..." (Low et al., 1995: 164)

As Burstall et al. (1974) reported, the introduction of reading and writing, especially, proved to be a major obstacle for many children, particularly those with special educational needs. With the introduction of written language some children began to struggle and the gap between higher and lower achievers started to widen. The Scottish final report (1995) states that 'there was clear ambivalence about the introduction of writing tasks' and that for some children 'this meant a wistful look back to the fun of primary'. The comment of a child in the first year of secondary school highlights the problem:

"I think I'm getting a lot of stuff wrong in French because I can't spell it right. I really enjoyed French in primary school, but when you're packing your bag you're thinking "oh no we've got French", it's so different in high school than primary." (Low et al., 1995: 74)

Higher ability children on the other hand were bored with repeating the same language, songs and stories and would have liked a much earlier introduction to reading and writing than had been the case. The more able children would have liked to do more written work and girls, especially, felt that at primary school 'too much time had been spent on certain topics and the repetition of

songs', that 'it was time to move on to 'real' learning, that writing was a necessary part of 'real learning' and 'that it provided a new challenge' (Low et al., 1995). One girl stated that she was quite glad that she was now doing some writing:

"...because now I can write things in French as well as just spelling them."  
(Low et. al, 1995: 73)

Another girl stated that writing was quite 'good' because:

"...we hardly did any writing in primary, so it's quite interesting to see how to actually spell the words." (Low et al., 1995: 73)

It has already been stated in Chapter One that Hawkins (1981) argued that the Pilot Scheme had to be seen as a 'double venture' in that it represented a 'vertical extension' of the teaching of French down the age range as well as a 'horizontal extension' across the ability range. These two crucial variables, age and ability, can cause problems for the evaluation of learning outcomes. It appears that many of the complex issues involved in the Pilot Scheme were treated in such a general way that decisive variables, such as age and ability, could often not be isolated and examined closely enough to arrive at a more objective picture. Similar problems seem to have affected the Scottish National Pilot.

### **3.4.7 Learning Strategies**

The 1995 report on the National Pilot emphasises the importance of strategies in successful foreign language learning and clearly indicates differences amongst individual children with respect to the application of these. However, because children of different ages seem to be grouped together, such as P7 (last year of primary school) and S1 (first year of secondary school) as well as the fact that some classes were composite classes, it is not clear whether the use of such strategies was age-related:

"First, the clearest difference between successful and less successful pupils at P7 and S1 appeared to be an awareness of the importance of self-management strategies, especially those of a cognitive and language production kind. To a lesser extent, a consciousness of emotional self-management and the importance of guessing and inferencing and of using the written word for learning and memorisation, also distinguished the successful from the less successful at each stage...the successful P7 pupils produced substantially more examples than the other three groups of statements about self-management (of all kinds), making use of textual resources, guessing and inferencing, use of the written word for learning or memorisation and attention to accuracy." (Low et al., 1995: 88)

The 1995 report further states that those pupils who were less successful were 'less likely than the other groups to mention planning, monitoring and evaluation or asking the teacher for help as a useful strategy'. Children's statements on the use of strategies include views such as 'it helps if you are enthusiastic', 'be honest and say you weren't listening', 'join in don't be shy', 'try to get used to it', 'revise for a week', 'look out for accents above the words'. There might be a difference between being able to describe a strategy and applying such a

strategy. As the report clearly states, in a Vygotskian learning psychology being able to describe a strategy represents a 'significant stage in the development of that strategy' (Low et al., 1995: 82). However, it is possible that the statements made by some children are simply repetitions of what they had been told by their teachers and not necessarily 'strategic' options of which they were aware. Finally, it seems rather unfortunate that Low et al. (1995: 88) also state that 'we have nothing to say about the less successful pupils in Primary 7'. One can only speculate that the less 'successful' pupils were also largely those that were reported as using 'avoidance' strategies.

### **3.5 Affective Learning Outcomes**

#### **3.5.1 Enthusiasm**

There is much anecdotal evidence from Scottish classrooms as well as from classrooms in England about young children's enthusiasm for learning a foreign language and their generally positive attitudes. The 1995 report stated that pupils generally enjoyed learning a foreign language in the primary school, especially the 'active' elements. Observations seem to suggest that children quite happily imitate, repeat and mimic language. Initially high levels of enthusiasm, combined with a natural degree of curiosity supported through the more 'fun' aspects of language learning such as games and songs, might give the young beginner an initial advantage at least in some aspects of foreign language learning. Older children might be less likely to respond with the same degree of enthusiasm to what they might perceive as 'babyish' and 'childish' activities.



Within the context of early foreign language schemes in England it has been reported for example that:

"Young children under ten respond without inhibitions to a new language, absorb it like a sponge and use it creatively for their own purposes. They are interested in learning about the culture and the way of life of children in other countries and will perform rhymes, raps, songs, playlets with real enthusiasm and amazing accuracy of pronunciation and intonation if they are encouraged to be creative with the new language from the start." (Satchwell, 1996: 169)

Setting aside for the moment the question of what precisely is meant by linguistic 'creativity' and 'using language for one's own purposes', Peck (1980) and Garvey (1977, 1991) suggest that language play, rhymes and songs do play an important part in language development. Peck (1980: 160) suggests that language play may contribute to language learning in several ways as it offers 'the kinds of practice opportunities, which give the child a chance to hear and produce phonological and syntactic forms and the intense affective climate'.

The value of 'playful' activities should therefore not be underestimated in helping children to develop the acquisition of the sound system of another language, in developing their phonological awareness and their listening skills generally, provided that a correct model is given. Language play, games and puzzles also allow children to experiment with ideas as well as develop their social skills and understanding:

"In this way play can contribute to the expertise of the player and to his effectiveness in the nonplay world, whether that be in the area of his social relationships with other children or in the competencies that facilitate the development of literacy." (Garvey, 1991: 168)

Games are reassuring through their repetitive nature and children generally like familiar and repetitive texts and stories as they can see themselves as successful in understanding these. It is also known from studies in child development that children generally enjoy making things, that they like to handle forms and materials. That young children should pursue such 'playful' activities with initial enthusiasm is therefore to be expected, after all this is what a large part of childhood learning is about. Games, plays and songs are activities, however, rather than learning outcomes and it would seem important to keep in mind that it is the *activities* that children respond to with enthusiasm. These activities cannot necessarily be equated with 'learning a foreign language' per se and, by implication, tell us very little about whether younger is better.

People might play as important a role as the activities. Enthusiasm and positive attitudes in the Basingstoke Language Awareness Project, for example, might have been due to children 'working' in very small groups outside the classroom with 'young and enthusiastic' native speakers' (Mitchell et al., 1992: 13). This is not to deny that enjoyable experiences and enthusiastic teachers are important ingredients in the overall learning process as they certainly facilitate the task.

Whether they are a necessary prerequisite for competence would seem another question. In any case, it would seem too simplistic to assume that by simply engaging children in playful activities foreign language development would come about. How far 'fun' activities develop children's cultural awareness remains also questionable, especially when much is carried out on the basis of repetition rather than understanding. In fact, experience has shown that 'fun' activities in the target language often preclude the development of cultural awareness, at least in the initial stages of learning and many games are simply neutral; there is nothing essentially French about 'I spy', for example.

That 'young children under ten respond without inhibitions to a new language and absorb it like a sponge' remains an assumption. For such an assumption to qualify as a universal it still would have to be shown to be the case if not for all at least for the majority of children for most aspects of language learning, not just at the imitation stage and in most contexts at most times.

### **3.5.2 Language Learning is 'Easy'**

Claims have been made that 'young children do not see a new language as 'hard' (Satchwell, 1996). However, it is known from studies in child development that young children, especially children under seven, are very unrealistic in their perceptions and do have little idea of what a task might involve (Harris, 1993). Not perceiving a new language as 'hard' does not necessarily make children good at learning it, especially if their perceptions are based on what would appear to be mainly 'fun' experiences, experiences which

sooner or later will change. As Naiman et al. (1978) argued, the good language learners are not necessarily those who find learning a language easy but those who overcome frustrations and show perseverance when the task becomes more difficult. While games, songs, play and 'fun' activities do have their role in language learning, successful learning of a foreign language goes beyond the 'fun' aspects and it is exactly at the stage where learning goes beyond the play stage that some children lose their initial enthusiasm, when, as both the Pilot Scheme and the Scottish Pilot have shown, differences amongst individual children begin to appear and when demotivation and the temptation to give up can easily set in. The fact that a number of children in the Scottish projects chose to change languages at secondary school seems to indicate that the initial enthusiasm was not maintained for long.

There is much anecdotal evidence that learners of all ages are generally very enthusiastic during the initial stages of learning and that beginners are always the easiest group to teach in that respect. Teachers generally agree that it is relatively easy to start children off on 'fun' activities. The real challenge, however, is in sustaining and maintaining the potential early enthusiasm at the stage when language 'fun' turns into language 'work'.

From Scotland it was reported that many children seemed to dislike what they saw as an essentially 'passive' role at secondary school and missed the spontaneous activities and games from primary school:

"This slightly negative view was exacerbated by mild dislike of the structured homework, vocabulary learning, grammar and writing that followed transition to the secondary." (Low et al., 1995: 81)

It is difficult to see how those children who dislike some of the most essential aspects of foreign language learning will manage to maintain their initial enthusiasm. Enthusiasm therefore would seem to be a question of experience as much as one of age.

### **3.5.3 Changing Attitudes**

An early successful experience in the Pilot Scheme seemed to affect later attitudes and achievement more than early positive attitudes:

"Attitudes towards learning French are, in any case, less reliable predictors of later achievement in French than early achievement is: in the language-learning context, nothing succeeds like success."  
(Burstall et al., 1974: 244).

Burstall et al. had also reported that the prospect of a visit to France was a most powerful incentive for pupils and that the absence of such a prospect had a highly demotivating effect on children who, as a result, thought that learning French was a waste of time. This finding was confirmed through findings in Scotland where the perceived 'usefulness' of French was also found to be very much a reflection of pupils' background.

Secondary school teachers in the Scottish National Pilot were asked if they had noticed any 'deterioration of any kind' amongst the early starters. According to the final report 59% of teachers said that they had not noticed any deterioration but 28% indicated that the novelty of starting a language at secondary school had gone:

"...a little over a quarter of the teachers also pointed to some waning of enthusiasm among some pupils who arrived at secondary with already several years of experience of learning the language." (Low et al., 1995: 173)

Low et al. also state that several years of experience of learning a language 'sometimes had a detrimental effect on motivation' (Low et al., 1995:163).

There is also substantial anecdotal evidence from colleagues at secondary school that some of the most disaffected children can be those who started to learn French at primary school. The above comments raise the important issue of 'success' and 'successful experiences'. How these are defined, how these are brought about and how they relate to successful foreign language development leaves much scope for further discussion not just in the context of young learners at primary school.

#### **3.5.4 Anxiety**

Relatively low levels of anxiety and a 'sense of achievement' at primary school were put down to a relaxed classroom atmosphere where understanding was not directly assessed and pupils' answers were in the form of whole class chorus or physical response. In contrast, in the secondary school pupils had to

show understanding of the target language on an individual basis. The 1995 report states that pupils in P7 were becoming aware of language anxiety but were also developing strategies for dealing with it:

"There were some anxieties, however, and these were expressed as pupils' fears about not being able to understand what the teacher said in the FL, to ask for help when needed or to 'perform' in the FL as required in front of the class." (Low et al., 1995: 81)

These statements would seem to be in conflict with earlier findings which suggested that the early starters found it easy to follow what the teacher said. It will later be suggested within the two case studies that 'anxieties' are likely to be a reflection of children's individuality and experience and not necessarily one of age. As will be seen later, worries about 'not being able to understand' or 'not wanting to speak in front of the class' exist even amongst young children aged eight.

### **3.6 Other Findings**

#### **3.6.1 Effects on Language Provision**

French was and still is by far the most widely taught language. In the Pilot Scheme it was the only language taught and in England there is currently over 26 times more French taught than any other language (CILT, 1995) again for largely 'practical' and historical reasons. In the Pilot Scheme the early teaching of French did not, as had been hoped, extend the study of other languages at secondary school. Unsurprisingly, the current sporadic and unplanned introduction of French in some primary schools is having exactly the same effect

on the spread of other languages in the secondary school curriculum despite a national diversification programme attempting to extend the number of first foreign languages being taught. The Office for Standards in Education, (OFSTED, 1993) reported that only around 25% of pupils study a language other than French and NALA View (1995) reported a 'significant' deterioration in the provision of languages other than French at secondary level.

The Scottish National Pilot has, to some extent, tried to avoid focus on one particular language by offering French, German, Spanish and Italian.

Nevertheless, French is still the most widely taught language, probably again for 'historical' and practical reasons and the individual child, of course, still focuses on one language only. Burstall stated that many children would have preferred to learn a language other than French:

"Over 60 per cent of those who dislike learning French would nevertheless like to have learnt a language other than French, taking the view that there are more important languages than French to learn. This point of view is more frequently expressed by boys than girls and tends to be associated with particular areas of the country." (Burstall, 1970: 43)

Within the context of the Scottish National Pilot it was reported that while many children did not want to change the language they started at primary school or 'lose the chance to build on the experience they already had of one language', out of 44 children interviewed 14, about one third of children, had changed their



language at the start of secondary school (Low et al., 1995: 72). Reasons for change given by the more able pupils were in the main parental wishes, the experiences of older brothers and sisters and 'the popularity of France for holidays'. The possibility of language choice affecting learning outcomes will be discussed again later in the chapter.

### **3.6.2 Children from Different Backgrounds**

The importance of children's background in evaluating learning outcomes cannot be overestimated. Plowden (1967) had already reported that parental encouragement was decisive for early foreign language learning success. Burstall et al. (1974) found that children from socio-economically advantaged backgrounds consistently performed better than those from more disadvantaged backgrounds. It was found that high achievement scores tended to coincide with high-status parental occupation. It was also found that girls in both primary and secondary schools consistently scored higher than boys irrespective of social class, that pupils in small rural schools performed better than those in larger schools and that pupils in the South of England performed better than those in the North. Research in Scotland suggested that:

"In terms of usefulness, the experience was explicitly valued by some pupils in the context of holidays abroad or prospective jobs in later life; a social class divide was apparent with these perceptions coming mainly from those in advantaged or affluent families." (Low et al., 1995: 81)

However, to what extent learning outcomes were, and are, affected by children's background and by what 'aspects' of background particularly, would seem to be difficult to establish.

### **3.7 Potential Problem Areas Surrounding Evaluations of Outcomes**

Any precise assessment and evaluation of learning outcomes is somewhat problematic due to the large number of variables at play. In an interventionist programme, where learning is brought about through teaching, aims and objectives, teaching methodologies and materials, patterns of provision, teacher competences, the language under investigation as well as methods of assessing achievement all play a crucial role. Some of the problems surrounding assessment of learning outcomes in the Pilot Scheme, for example, have already been discussed in Chapter One. In the context of the Scottish Pilot, as was stated earlier, researchers were hesitant to draw any definite conclusions 'due to the large number of variables involved'.

In the past, as much as in the present, possible 'obstacles to success have included methods, teacher skills and competence, patterns of provision and above all continuity between primary and secondary school. Further questions have been posed: what if methods had been different? What if the teachers had been more competent? What if there had been continuity between primary and secondary school? The following pages will address these issues.

### **3.7.1 Methods**

What if methods had been different? The issue of methods is of course of prime importance when discussing learning outcomes. What children can or cannot do depends very much on appropriate aims and objectives as well as appropriate methods and materials. As was stated in Chapter One the audio-visual methodology took a good proportion of the blame for the failure of the Pilot Scheme as well as the American FLES programmes.

#### **3.7.1.1 Audio-visual Methodology**

One of the questions addressed in the Pilot Scheme was what methods, attitudes and incentives were the most effective in promoting the learning of French and Burstall et al. (1974) had found that 'there was no single method that suited all children'. At the time, this finding must have come as a surprise to many; after all the audio-visual method had been heralded as suitable for all young children of all abilities. It was assumed at the time, that these did not require any higher- level cognitive operations and would turn language learning into 'child's play':

"To chatter in French we can say frankly, carries no cachet of intellectual respectability. With adequate opportunities for hearing the language, for reproducing the sounds and for associating these sounds with objects and activities they convey, children with an I.Q. of 80 can acquire this accomplishment." (Taylor, in: Libbush, 1964: 155/6)

Based on a behaviorist theory of language learning (Skinner, 1957) and on the assumption that foreign languages can be learned as 'effortlessly' as a first

language is acquired, foreign language learning was seen as a process of habit formation through the drilling of patterns, through repetition and through positive reinforcement (Brooks, 1964: 49). Spoken language was the basis for learning; reading and writing were of secondary importance and problem solving activities were seen as unnecessary. Contrastive analysis of the learner's first language and the target language and the assumption that errors were caused by interference from the learner's first language led to the ban of the mother tongue (Lado, 1964). Language was practised but not talked about and errors were to be avoided at all costs. Explanations of the formal properties of language were rigorously subordinate to the formation of habits, the general view being that children were not interested 'in the finer points of language'. However, Kellerman (1964) had already shown that this was far from being the case. While the weaker children lost interest in French very quickly the more able children thought that they were 'too good for endless repetition'.

Kellermann's later criticism was even stronger:

"With languages, new structure arrangements are taught also through repetition... leading to habit formation. But are children like rats, or should we treat them as if they were rats? Can we, in other words, establish lawful stimulus-response in child behaviour?" (Kellermann, 1967: 76/77)

Kellermann also criticised the audio-visual method for not 'enlarging the child's outlook and experience'. As a result of her experience, she stressed the need for a differentiated and cyclical approach to teaching and learning, the gradual introduction of the written language and the need for pace and variety.

As has been reported earlier (Lee, 1977), there is very little evidence on precise classroom processes during the project, however, audio-visual method was widely used throughout the Pilot Scheme and is likely to be at least partially responsible for the 'failure' of the Scheme and for children's inability to move beyond pre-fabricated patterns and create language of their own choice and meaning. Burstall et al. (1974) reported that pupils were endlessly repeating chunks of language in meaningless contexts, received few explanations of language patterns or meanings and often had little understanding of what it was they were actually saying. The tape recorder was the centre piece in classrooms which frequently contained between 30 and 40 children. Scope for individual attention and contribution was limited.

Rivers (1964) presents a critical examination of the audio-visual method in foreign language teaching and learning generally. As far as young children are concerned, it would seem that the method failed them for a number of reasons. Firstly, it was inadequate as a model for the teaching of a foreign language in the classroom, encouraging rote learning but not developing insights into language patterns or meanings. Avoiding references to the mother tongue and grammatical explanations did little to help children understand language as a system. In fact, one could argue that the potential ambiguity of some pictures would necessitate the use of the mother tongue. Secondly, it had originally been designed for adults, largely army personnel on intensive courses and required high levels of motivation and good concentration spans neither of which prevail amongst young children. Thirdly, it took no account of differences

in language and cognitive development between children of the same chronological age and lacked stimulus as well as pace and variety.

As Mc Laughlin (1985) stated, many children found the activities not worthy of their efforts. Burstall, and Kellermann before her, had reported that the more 'able' children asked for explanations of vocabulary and structures and wanted to know what they were learning and why they were learning it.

That teachers were unable to adapt methods and materials to suit the needs of individual children should have come as no surprise. After all they had been trained through precisely the same methods and materials and probably could not do much else other than make the tape recorder the centrepiece of their classrooms. Hawkins (1981: 174) states that the audio-visual method was not a method at all but simply an 'entertaining' aid in the presentation of new language. It would appear that even the 'entertainment' factor was lacking for a large number of both pupils and teachers.

### **3.7.1.2 Current Methods**

Pedagogical approaches have changed since the 1960s and 'communicative' language teaching is assumed to have replaced the audio-visual method.

Nevertheless, learning outcomes do not appear much different at least as far as lexical and syntactical development are concerned. As has been reported from Scotland, children, on the whole, are good at repeating and imitating chunks of language but hardly ever manipulate pre-fabricated language. Low et al. state that primary pupils:

"...don't have the structures to be able to manipulate the language, and we have to give them these tools to be able to create, manipulate and transfer."  
(Low et. al, 1995: 48)

This general lack in structural progression amongst children could partially be explained by inadequate methodologies and by not giving children the 'tools'. Researchers state that while most teachers interviewed seemed to agree on the need to develop pupils' awareness of how language works and to focus their attention on the structural properties of language, this was apparently not happening during lessons. One teacher said that it was hoped that primary children would pick structures up 'by osmosis' (Low et al., 1995: 48) and in the fourteen primary lessons observed researchers noted only six specific instances (Low et al., 1995: 21) where teachers drew the pupils' attention to structure:

"It is important to add, however, that there were very few instances where primary pupils' attention was explicitly drawn to language structure."  
(Low et al., 1995: 34)

It was generally assumed that a wide range of language experiences and 'natural opportunities' focusing on songs, stories, miming, games and making things would allow children:

"...to gain familiarity with more complex structures than those pursued in the texts and associated materials of early secondary..." (Low et al., 1995: 34)

'Picking language up', however, clearly did not happen as was seen in the earlier section on syntactical development, despite children 'being exposed to a wider range of structures than in secondary' (Low et al., 1995: 58). Krashen & Terrell state that:

"According to the Input hypothesis, speaking is not absolutely essential for language acquisition. We acquire from what we hear (or read) and understand, not from what we say." (Krashen & Terrell, 1988: 56)

However, despite claims by Terrell (1977), Dulay, Burt & Krashen (1982) and Krashen & Terrell (1988), it is questionable whether simply exposing learners to meaningful and comprehensible language input is sufficient in developing accurate use of language:

"Research...has shown quite clearly that a communicatively-oriented input-rich environment does not provide all the necessary conditions for second language acquisition, and that focus on form within these communicative settings can significantly enhance performance." (Swain, 1995: 141)

Research into Canadian immersion programmes suggests that later starters do as well as those children who had been immersed in the second language since kindergarten (Genesee, 1981) and while 'functional competence is higher than in normal foreign language classes' (Swain 1976, 1981) many children make numerous grammatical errors and appear to have 'vast gaps in their knowledge' (Bibeau, 1984) even after several years of immersion. Swain studied the language output of learners on French immersion programmes and found that



even after plenty of language input they had not acquired much grammatical competence. Comprehensible and meaningful input alone does therefore not seem to lead to more accurate and advanced language performance.

Comprehensible language output, however, raises consciousness, it encourages the learner to notice gaps between his interlanguage and the target language, it allows the learner to test things out, receive feedback and modify future output accordingly:

"Comprehensible output...is a necessary mechanism of acquisition independent of the role of comprehensible input. Its role is, at minimum, to provide opportunities for contextualized, meaningful use, to test out hypotheses about the target language, and to move the learner from a purely semantic analysis of the language to a syntactic analysis of it."

(Swain, 1985: 252)

Meaningful and comprehensible language output therefore seems important, raising questions about the value of extensive 'total physical response' activities as proposed by Asher (1969, 1972) in second language development. It would also seem important, as stated earlier, that the formal properties of language should be taught. What became apparent in interviews with the teachers, both primary and secondary, during the Scottish evaluation was that they clearly perceived differences in children's 'abilities' to cope with the more formal aspects of language and that many children simply did not benefit from more focused instruction. Widdowson (1990) suggests that a conscious focus on form could be encouraged through problem-solving tasks which enable learners to notice the formal properties of the target language. Such an approach would

clearly have to take into account a child's developmental stage rather than his age. Focus on cognates, for example, 'would need to take account of apparent maturational factors in the ability to analyze words' (Harley, 1996: 8). In order to 'decontextualise' language and to apply structures across contexts, for example, children would need to have developed the ability to recognise similarities in contexts and make connections between these and if they are at a stage in their development where they are still context-embedded in their first language, it is unlikely that they will be able to do this in a foreign language, especially within the constraints of the classroom.

What remains of questionable value are 'language free' activities and materials such as colouring, drawing and 'making' things. These are not inherently objectionable as they have 'affective' value and are inevitable with pre-literate foreign language 'learners'. However, they would appear to have little value in facilitating linguistic progression and their educational value for older and literate children remains therefore questionable. In the context of the Basingstoke Language Awareness Project in the early 1990s Mitchell et al. (1992: 17) state that 'the potential of practical activities for developing "usable" classroom language is obvious'. This is likely to be the case if activities are carefully designed and accompanied by appropriate use of the target language. However, Rapaport & Westgate also comment on the 'making of French dolls' which might serve as a 'smokescreen behind which "repeating from the tape" constitutes the major so-called learning':

"This activity, and others like model-making or colouring in a workbook, can, however, become a time-consuming refuge from learning. Such tasks all too frequently indicate undigested modern methods; the principle of activity is seized upon to the exclusion of thought about the purposes it may serve."  
(Rapaport & Westgate, 1974: 24)

It would therefore seem necessary to examine closely the nature of those activities and interactions 'which clearly play a central role in the child's classroom experience' (Galton, Simon & Croll, 1980: 85). With all procedures, tasks, activities and materials the question would need to be asked 'whether they are helpful, whether they deliver the goods and whether the goods are worth having' (Barrow, 1984).

### **3.7.1.3 References to Children's First Language**

As was stated in Chapter One, Burstall et al. (1974) had reported that the introduction of a foreign language at the primary level did not 'encourage the belief that teaching a foreign language to primary school children will necessarily stimulate the development of verbal skills in their mother tongue' nor did it have any significant influence on achievement in other areas of the curriculum. This finding, however, should have been no surprise if one takes into account that audio-visual methods encouraged rote-learning and explicitly banned explanations of the formal properties of language and the use of the mother-tongue from the classroom. Rapaport & Westgate stated that teachers and children must feel free to use the mother tongue whenever clarification is needed:

"It is certain that clarity at this stage of the process is crucial and far outweighs any dogmatic avoidance of contact between the two languages."

(Rapaport & Westgate, 1974: 64)

The finding in the Scottish evaluation of the National Pilot that discussions of language similarities and differences 'hardly took place' was also predictable; after all, the original aim favoured maximum use of the target language and 'communicative competence' over 'language awareness'. In contrast to the early stipulation, however, the Scottish final evaluation of the Pilot quite clearly points to the dangers of such an approach:

"...the insistence on the FL as the medium of instruction and interaction in the primary classroom was not only a source of anxiety for some pupils (who were concerned about not being able to speak well or understand), it also helped to relegate the primary classteachers to a subordinate role." (Low et al., 1995: 82)

The validity of an approach which systematically avoids the target language in the English primary school classroom has also been questioned by the writer who discussed possible effects on both children's cognitive and affective development (Poole, 1994). Recognising the importance of making references to children's first languages, however, does not mean underestimating the complexities and challenges of such an approach in the multilingual classroom, a point which will be taken up again later in the context of the two case studies.

#### **3.7.1.4 Access to Written Language**

Early foreign language programmes have traditionally focused on listening and speaking activities with written language playing a secondary role as in the acquisition of a first language. In the 1960s there was widespread agreement that there should be considerable delay in the introduction of reading and writing skills as these were thought to interfere with spoken language and both the FLES programmes and the Pilot Scheme focused on developing children's spoken and listening language skills:

"Premature exposure to written words so dissimilar in interpretation to the native language causes confusion in the child's mind and a sudden deterioration in pronunciation." (Taylor, in Libbich, 1964: 74)

However, already in 1964 Rivers questioned the wisdom of withholding the written word in the early stages of foreign language learning. The writer (Poole, 1996a, 1997) suggested that a totally spoken approach would not allow children to make as much progress as they might make if written language were introduced into early foreign language learning schemes and excessive focus on speaking and listening at the expense of reading and writing does little for the development of structural competence, for example. Cases of 'limited spoken' foreign language competence reported from Scotland could be a reflection of a teaching and learning context:

"...where the strong early emphasis is on 'listening' (and to a limited extent 'speaking') and on 'action' rather than 'reflection'." (Low et al., 1995: 176)

Early or even simultaneous introduction of written language can support rather than hinder progress. Burstall had reported that many children complained:

"...that they cannot remember words unless they see them written down and, consequently, experience considerable difficulty during the oral phase of learning French." (Burstall, 1970: 54)

In the 1990s spoken language still takes on a primary role in early foreign language schemes and reading and writing are frequently not introduced until the second or even the third year of foreign language learning. Very recently it is reported from Council of Europe workshops that:

"...in the first years the young learners spend most of the time listening to and speaking in the foreign language..." (Ytreberg, 1997: 30)

It is further stated that:

"A wholly oral approach, which is possible for a longer period at this early stage and which may be less acceptable later, allows more pupils to succeed in modern language work." (Trim, quoted in Doyé & Hurrell, 1997: 12)

Such comments, as well as the motives behind them, would seem highly questionable. They seem at best optimistic and at worst counterproductive and obscure some of the real issues at hand, such as the definition of success, what constitutes modern language 'work' and whether younger is indeed better.

Burstall had highlighted the introduction of reading as a 'critical period' in the learning process. For some pupils the introduction of reading in French provided a welcome stimulus for others it constituted a stumbling- block:

"To judge both from the test results and from the pupils' own comments, the introduction of reading constitutes a critical period in the language learning process. For some pupils, it provides a welcome return to a familiar medium of achievement; for others, it presents an almost insuperable obstacle to further progress. Pupils accustomed to a high level of achievement in their written work are often frustrated and uneasy during the purely oral phase of learning French and press for the earlier introduction of reading and writing."

(Burstall, 1970: 27)

The place of written language in an early scheme, when and how written language is introduced, would very much depend on the language pairs involved and on the aims of a scheme. The crucial issue of written language in successful foreign language learning within the constraints of the classroom will be discussed further in Chapter Four.

### **3.7.2 Teacher Competence**

What if there had been an adequate supply of properly qualified, educated and trained teachers? The dangers of inadequate methods in the hands of inexperienced and poorly trained teachers was highlighted by Williams (1970) within the context of the Pilot Scheme. He argued that teachers' lack of fluency in French combined with the fact that they did not have the competence or skills to supplement the available materials was one of the weakest aspects of the project.

Thirty years on one cannot avoid a sense of 'déjà vu'. In the context of staffing early foreign language schemes at primary schools CILT reported that there were 455 'qualified' MFL teachers with a teaching qualification in Modern Foreign Languages or a qualification at A-Level or above and 410 'non-qualified' teachers teaching at primary school level (CILT, 1995: 7). However, an A-level in a language cannot be equated with a teaching qualification in that language nor can foreign nationals necessarily be regarded as qualified. The 'qualification' of parents would also need to be examined more closely. While some might indeed be qualified linguists others might simply be deemed 'qualified' by virtue of being a native-speaker.

Making reference to a child's mother tongue, giving sensitive and constructive feedback, focusing children's minds on the structural properties of language as well as selecting, sequencing and grading of language, requires teachers who have the necessary understanding, knowledge, skills and confidence to plan effectively, to resource effectively, to set challenging tasks, to question children skilfully and to evaluate teaching and learning outcomes. Within a programme that sets its aim as developing 'native-like' communicative competence, fluency and good pronunciation would seem a prerequisite. Children need to interact with linguistically proficient teachers and a 'confident' command of a 'core of language' only (which seems to be the content of the bulk of current training schemes) is unlikely to be sufficient in fostering children's language development. The teacher who only has 'a good command of a core of language' is likely to be locked into stimulus-response behaviour himself.



He is unlikely to be able to take pupils beyond such behaviour and provide them with the input needed to develop discourse skills, for example. In 1992 Adamson ran an in-service course for Scottish primary school teachers and wrote that:

"The type of language training teachers receive seems at present to be a hit and miss affair, with little research being done into the precise linguistic content of the course." (Adamson, 1992: 9)

A large-scale teacher training programme for primary teachers has since been implemented in Scotland, where teachers are trained on a 27- day programme or 160 hours over one year. The aim of the training courses is to give the primary teachers:

"...sufficient linguistic competence within specific areas..." and to "...increase teachers' awareness of appropriate methodology for teaching a language to primary age children." (Tierney, 1995: 9)

Whether the wide range of competences and skills necessary to teach a foreign language to young children can be achieved on a 27-day training course remains questionable, especially in the light of the linguistic background of some of the teachers on the training programmes:

"...43 teachers had no prior knowledge of the language, 104 had a limited amount - perhaps an 'O' grade or its equivalent, 185 had perhaps a Higher or current tourist language (a Higher is the post-16 examination in Scotland) and 19 teachers had a knowledge beyond Higher level of the language which they were studying." (Tierney, 1995: 11)

The implicit assumption underlying such a training model, namely that the majority of teachers, if not all, and by implication older learners, can be successful in learning a foreign language from scratch is even more interesting in the light of the discussions on maturational constraints on language development in Chapter Two. If adults with no previous experience of the foreign language are deemed to be trainable as suitable role models then this would surely undermine any justification for an early start based on phonological considerations only.

Just one example of the many misconceptions surrounding the teaching of a foreign language to young children is provided by The NFER- Nelson Training Company (National Foundation for Educational Research) who offered a 2-day training course in November 1997 entitled 'Teaching Primary French - Learn How to Do it in Just 2 days'. This course was aimed at primary school teachers with a basic knowledge of French such as rusty O-level who would benefit from a refresher course or simply just 'Francophiles'. The course promised to provide delegates with the confidence and linguistic skills to introduce French, a one year scheme of work, motivating strategies and materials and a professional understanding of methodology in MFL teaching and learning at primary school.

It seems that the Scottish National Pilot has since encountered a number of problems as the involvement of the visiting specialist teachers who had played a major role in the Pilot had to be reduced for financial reasons. Further funding

for the training of teachers seems unlikely and as a consequence no more than 60% of schools were said to have trained staff by the end of 1996 (MPLS Update, HMSO Scotland, J1354, 12/95). These developments are likely to have serious implications for future outcomes of the projects and highlight the dangers of setting up pilots under conditions which cannot be maintained once special arrangements are withdrawn.

In any case, teacher skills, knowledge and understanding are very closely linked to aims and methodologies of a scheme and whether one prepares children for future language learning, whether one aims to develop communicative competence or whether one attempts to raise children's cultural awareness, would quite clearly require different competences from a teacher. Rapaport & Westgate had already suggested in 1974 that a clear difference needs to be drawn between linguistic and cultural aspects of language development, methods and outcomes:

"Linguistic and cultural objectives may overlap, but they remain very different as far as their respective conceptual frameworks are concerned. The one involves patient accumulation and mastery of the forms and modulation of a communication system; the other refers to cultural factors of which language is only a part and for the exploration of which a developed command of the language in question is not essential." (Rapaport & Westgate, 1974: 13)

While younger might be better for the development of the latter, it would still seem questionable whether younger is necessarily better for the former.

### **3.7.3 Continuity**

What if there were continuity between primary and secondary schools?

The problem of continuity between primary and secondary schools has already been mentioned in the opening chapter within the context of the Pilot Scheme and the current situation in England. The fact that early starters are generally in the same classes with children starting a foreign language at secondary school is commonly regarded as one of the main 'obstacles' to success. However, it was also reported earlier that researchers in Scotland found that the initial 'gains' did not last much beyond the first year at secondary school, one would assume despite the fact that the Scottish Pilot endeavoured to guarantee continuity as much as possible. The reader will remember that one of the Local Education Authority advisers in the 1995 CILT survey had stated that by the end of the first year the older starters have caught up with the early starters. There is also much anecdotal evidence from colleagues in schools that by the end of the first year at secondary school the later starters have usually caught up with the early starters even in contexts where early starters have been taught separately. In any case, the concept of 'continuity' would seem to require further clarification in terms of continuity of what? Language, methods or both?

### **3.7.4 Choice of Language**

What if children had been learning a different language? It is commonly known that not all children are equally motivated (or unmotivated) to learn a particular foreign language. Children in primary schools normally do not choose a foreign language but a language is chosen for them with, as has been seen, choice

often based on historical and practical expedience (see Hawkins, 1981, for an extensive discussion of French in British schools) rather than on pedagogical considerations. As a consequence, children might not only be learning a language they have not chosen but they might also be learning a language which they perceive as difficult or one they actively dislike. Disliking a language can also be the result of unsuccessful learning experiences, as Burstall et al. (1974) had shown. Burstall et al. reported that after one year many pupils still liked learning French but that a quarter of children already thought that French was beyond them. After 3 years only a bare majority still liked French and those who did were generally from more advantaged socio-economic backgrounds. Those who liked French were also positive towards learning other languages while those who disliked French were hostile towards all languages and concluded that the learning of any language was not for them.

Burstall et al. suggested that favourable attitudes decreased significantly from year 1 to year 3 due to the increasing difficulty of French and the irrelevance of French for future employment. The level of prestige attached to a language, perceived language relevance, language difficulty in terms of children's perception and/or in relation to their first language, are all likely to influence attitudes and motivation and by implication learning outcomes.

Language choice, past and present, however, seems very much a question of expedience rather than the result of educational planning. If schools considered the implications of choice of language on pedagogy and eventual learning

outcomes, the effect French might have, for example, on the performance of those children who are still developing first language literacy skills and the ability to match sound to symbol, choice of language might well be very different. It is precisely a lack of clear aims and objectives, however, which results in such arbitrary decision making and what is practically feasible becomes more important than what might be educationally desirable.

An important question that still needs answering, however, is how far one can extrapolate the findings from one language to another. If children were given a choice of language would results be different? Even if results were different, however, would this necessarily mean that younger is better or could the same have been achieved more efficiently later?

### **3.7.5 The Special Case of English**

Many of the arguments surrounding the special status of English in the context of second language development are not new (see Hoy, 1976, for example) but are worth summarising as the dominance of English as a world language would seem to have important implications not only for the motivation of the young learner but for a rationale for an early start in general as well as expectations and eventual comparisons of learning outcomes. Harris (1992: 23), for example, states that it would be quite wrong to expect similar learning outcomes from schemes where children are learning English to those where they are learning a 'foreign' language.

English is the language of international business, science and technology and dominates advertising and youth culture. Economies and trade relations across the world depend on English and the need for English is widely recognised in countries where the local language has limited currency. Knowledge of English is often crucial for securing employment or for entry into post-16 education and knowledge of English provides for social mobility. English is not only dominant in the areas above, however, but is also frequently used as the language for communication across nations.

Comparisons of learning outcomes with other countries would therefore seem flawed and the high international status of English as a lingua franca seems to render any simplistic comparisons invalid. As Berns (1989) argued, in many countries English is a second and often officially recognised language rather than a foreign language and the learning of English takes place in a context closer to natural second language acquisition contexts than a foreign language context. Even in Europe, where the status of English can be regarded as a 'half-way house' between a foreign language and a second language, pupils are exposed to a great amount of the language outside school. This is not to argue that all young children across the world are equally keen to learn English as this is quite clearly not the case. Observing a number of lessons in primary school classrooms abroad has shown that some children can be just as inattentive, for example, as they are in this country. Nevertheless, teachers can generally build on higher levels of motivation, extrinsic or intrinsic, and on language children bring with them from experiences outside school hours. At the age of 10 or 11

some continental children have already 'acquired' more than a modest amount of the target language from sources outside the classroom. Edelenbos & Suhre (1996) state that in Holland, for example, 'pupils' environment is very much oriented towards the English language, that the media and magazines offer an overwhelming exposure to the English language and that this enriched environment might be of major importance' in what they achieve. Studies by Vinje (1993) summarised in Edelenbos & Suhre (1996) suggest that:

"...the mastery level of English is satisfactory, especially with regard to listening performance. The strikingly good results for listening raise the suggestion that pupils learn English outside of school as well. More than 50% of the children say they learn the same amount of English outside the school as inside it."  
(Edelenbos & Suhre, 1996: 55)

Additionally, it is important to bear in mind that children in Holland attend primary school up to the age of 12 when discussing achievement in English at Dutch primary schools. Comparing children in other countries learning English at primary school with children in this country learning a foreign language is therefore not comparing like with like. Formal as well as social or affective language distances or similarities would have to be taken into account as well as quantity and quality of language input and output. For speakers of Dutch, for example, English might be a relatively easy language to learn at least at the beginning stages. The conceptual 'leaps' the young English-speaking learner of French or German has to make in comparison would seem greater.



The writer's personal involvement in European early language learning projects and discussions with colleagues have shown that results are not all rosy even in contexts where children are learning English. Although there is usually widespread enthusiasm amongst policy makers, teachers and learners, linguistic learning outcomes would appear rather limited. Lesson observations have shown a degree of reluctance amongst children to use the foreign language even after several years of exposure and children often do not remember language material which, according to the teachers, had been practised over a considerable length of time. It seems important to add, however, that not all early foreign language learning schemes consider the measurement of 'formal attainment' important, necessary or even desirable, as seems to be the case with some projects in Germany where according to Kubanek-German (1996) the development of pupils' understanding of other cultures is seen as the issue of major importance. Interestingly enough, such 'understanding' of other cultures has led to situations where children in Greece communicate with children in Spain through the medium of English! Chapter One already commented on the increase of early language learning projects, usually English, across Europe. A very important question would seem to be whether countries would give equally strong support to the large-scale introduction from an early age of a foreign language for which children might have little or no obvious future use.

### **3.7.6 Assessment Issues**

A number of problems surrounding the assessment of learning outcomes during the Pilot Scheme have already been discussed in Chapter One. An important lesson from experiences past and present would seem to be that without clear aims and objectives and methodologies to suit, any valid evaluation of a project will be problematic and any potential benefits of an early start will be difficult to establish. A crucial consideration in assessing and evaluating learning outcomes therefore would seem to be the question of the aims of a project.

A wide range of aims in the Pilot Scheme, to identify 'on what conditions it would be feasible to contemplate the general introduction of a modern language into the primary school curriculum' (Schools Council, 1966: 3), to ascertain 'whether or not an earlier start provided identifiable advantages over starting at 11' (Schools Council, 1966: 5) and to find out 'whether it was educationally desirable to teach a modern foreign language to pupils of a wider range of age and ability' (Burstall et al., 1974: 11) must be held partially responsible for the 'failure' of the Pilot Scheme. The identification of favourable conditions cannot be equated with what is educationally desirable and what might be educationally desirable does often take place under less than favourable conditions.

The evaluation of the Scottish National Pilot focused on two case studies or project clusters only, and while these were not considered atypical they nevertheless represented only a small sample of the large number of schools involved on a national scale. Consequently, the number of pupils and teachers

involved in the evaluation was relatively small as was the number of lessons observed. How pupils were paired, for example, is not quite clear and as several primary school classes were composite classes with children from two to four different age groups (Low et al., 1996: 59) it is not always clear who exactly did what.

The final report states that there was no common syllabus of vocabulary, structures and functions between individual schools. This would seem to make comparisons between cohort groups and control groups difficult as well as between cohort groups and other cohort groups. 'Achievement' becomes difficult to measure without clear reference to a particular course of teaching and learning and a definition of what constitutes attainment, achievement, success or failure becomes problematic.

Ellis states that 'there is no direct window through which the researcher can peer to discover what the learner knows':

"When researchers seek to relate instructional treatments to learning outcomes, they need instruments with which to measure what learning has taken place. The problem facing the L2 acquisition researcher is really the same as that facing the language tester - how to provide valid and reliable measurements of what the learner knows." (Ellis, 1990: 57)

Skehan (1988: 16) suggested, for example, that 'the length of an utterance is an increasingly unreliable indicator of syntactic complexity' and some of the difficulties surrounding the evaluation of lexical development have already been

discussed. The Scottish researchers are right in stating that not all assessment needs to be geared to individual learners and that paired interviews are 'economical and offer less stressful contexts'. However, the writer would like to argue that it is the characteristics of paired interviews which can mask differences between individual children, differences which might question the common belief that younger is better for all.

The reader will remember from the beginning of the chapter that the aim of the Scottish evaluation was to find out 'whether a particular cohort (FLPS) is more advanced than another cohort (non-FLPS)' (Johnstone, 1991: 37). However, during the course of the evaluation the focus was shifted from comparisons between non-project and project pupils to comparisons between project pupils:

"By the second round of paired interviews in May 1992 attention had switched from project vs non-project comparisons to inter-stage comparisons of three project cohorts - P7, S1 and S2. The main questions to be addressed in this round were: - What are the main characteristics of 'project' pupils' listening and speaking at P7, S1 and S2?; and to what extent is progression evident from P7 to S1, and S1 to S2?" (Low, Scottish CILT INFO 1, 1993: 6)

Such a fundamental shift would seem crucially important and detrimental if one is to establish whether an early start does indeed make a difference compared to a later start.

### **3.8 Conclusion**

Learning outcomes from the Pilot Scheme and the Scottish National Pilot seem to invite important comparisons. Setting aside those aspects which can be classified as likely 'spin-offs' from foreign language learning and teaching, such as better social skills and improved cultural awareness, but do not require the teaching of a foreign language per se, outcomes from both the Pilot Scheme and the Scottish National Pilot would seem similar in a number of respects. From both projects it had been reported that while children readily repeated chunks of language they showed little improvement in their ability to manipulate language chunks creatively or in their ability to interact spontaneously to any degree. From Scotland it is reported that small gains in listening and speaking skills in the first two years of secondary school soon seem to disappear. This had also been the case in the Pilot Scheme where at the age of 16 the early starters showed only small gains in listening skills.

While limited progress might, to some extent, be a reflection of inappropriate methods, past or present, it also suggests that languages are not 'picked up' in the primary school classroom but have to be learned and therefore taught. Both the Pilot Scheme as well as the Scottish National Pilot and the projects in England are intervention projects. In this sense, they are very different from natural acquisition contexts. In an interventionist context, rather than a natural acquisition context, learning is brought about through teaching and by implication places a range of demands on the learner. The concept of 'ability' recurs across schemes both past and present. This would seem to suggest that

even if Chomsky is right in postulating innate language learning mechanisms for the acquisition of a first language and even if innate mechanisms and age-related factors play a role in the acquisition of a second language in natural contexts, they are unlikely to be sufficient for the successful learning of a foreign language within the constraints of formal learning situations where other learning mechanisms play a role.

Thus the various reports from Scotland tell the reader much about what children have learned (or not learned as might be the case). That primary school children do learn some language material is to be expected. It is also to be expected that with different methodologies and teachers better equipped for the task, some children might have done better. However, this does not necessarily lend support to the view that younger is better as one cannot discard the possibility that similar results could have been achieved more efficiently at a later stage, as the evidence discussed in Chapters Two suggests.

Potential benefits of an early start, such as increased levels of motivation, are psychological rather than linguistic. However, psychological benefits, such as positive attitudes and increased willingness to speak, are fickle learner variables and as such they are subject to change in the classroom. Affective factors would therefore seem only limited indicators of eventual success. In any case, positive attitudes could be a reflection of children's 'fun' experiences at primary school rather than of an early start as such. As the comments from teachers have also shown, these 'learning outcomes' did not apply to all the children

involved in any case and the so-called 'lower ability' learners were demotivated from an early stage. The reader will remember that some of the evidence from second language acquisition research suggested that younger might be better as far as 'ultimate attainment' or 'attainment in the long run' was concerned. The same cannot necessarily be claimed for learning a foreign language in a school context where many learners drop-out early, mentally or physically. The decline in the number of pupils studying a foreign language post-16 has already been reported and this steady decline has been happening in Scotland despite an early start. Comenius News reports that 'the state of modern languages in Scotland has been described as 'a disgrace' by Scottish Office Minister Brian Wilson:

"...after it was revealed that the number of Scottish pupils studying a modern language at Higher Grade had dropped from 36 per cent in 1975 to 12 per cent in 1996. This was despite the implementation of a 'languages for all' policy to age 16 and the introduction in 1993 of a scheme to extend the teaching of a foreign language to all pupils in primary six and seven."

(Comenius News, CILT, 1997, Issue 10: cover page)

The reasons for such a low take up could be manifold and are, as far as the writer is aware, currently being investigated. However, if learners do not continue with a foreign language at a time when it matters most, the assumption that an early start makes a difference, either linguistically or with regard to affect, remains questionable. What is still lacking then is convincing evidence that would support the claim that the Scottish projects show that 'an early start does make a difference' (as claimed by CILT , 1997: 44).

There is, as yet, little evidence that what was achieved at primary school could not have been achieved at a later stage more effectively and within less time. The Scottish Office for Education and Industry Department has since invited tenders for a research project on Modern Languages in the Primary School (MPLS). The research specification states that:

"It is probably too soon to evaluate the outcomes in terms of pupils' achievement in language learning, however, anecdotal evidence indicates that a number of problems has arisen regarding other factors, in particular choice of language, articulation with languages offered in secondary schools, and availability of trained teachers. More information about the pattern of implementation of MLPS across Scotland is now required."

(Ref: TRR/5/4(98/99), 17 April, 1998, p:1)

The writer would like the reader to draw his or her own conclusion from the above statement. Stern, an international expert in the area of early language learning who became, intentionally or not, an instigator of the 1960s movements later expressed serious reservations about the benefits of an early start:

"Some educators and also groups of parents are not aware of the lack of evidence for the dictum 'the earlier the better'. They believe it is 'obvious' that early is better, and they are so convinced of this that they regard any questioning of this view as flying in the face of 'scientific' evidence or as a smoke screen for retro-grade policies on the part of educational authorities. They automatically applaud an early start as right and 'progressive'...if one wishes to base policy on the evidence of research, there is little support in the available literature for regarding an early start as imperative."

(Stern 1982: 13, quoted in Harns, 1992: 17)



At the end of this chapter it would not seem inappropriate to add evidence from 'experience' to the evidence from the 'literature' in Chapter Two and suggest that Stern's claim remains largely unchallenged. The following Chapter Four will deal with a range of substrates required to learn a foreign language efficiently and ultimately successfully within the artificial constraints of the classroom, where learning a language is likely to require more than access to innate language learning mechanisms and principles.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **Factors Affecting Foreign Language Learning in the Primary School Classroom**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

Wong-Fillmore states that the assumption that the same uniform processes and developmental schedules which govern first language development also govern the acquisition or learning of another language has led to the generally accepted view that individual differences are not significant. However, her own study of 5 Spanish-speaking Mexican children aged 5-7 acquiring English in the US (Wong-Fillmore, 1979) clearly showed that this is not the case:

"...the issue of individual variation is rarely discussed in studies of childhood second language acquisition, this despite the fact that even the most casual observations of the language performance of any group of children in the process of learning a second language naturalistic or otherwise would reveal considerable variation in the rate and ease at which they are managing the learning of it and how well they are able to use the language they are learning. But because researchers are more interested in discovering what is universal about the acquisition process than in knowing whether the process might vary in individuals, the question is never discussed or even raised."  
(Wong-Fillmore, 1979: 205)

Wong-Fillmore reported that although there was a 'striking similarity amongst the children in the acquisition and use of formulaic language', by the end of 3 months of observation it became 'clear that there were differences between the five children in what they would achieve' (Wong-Fillmore, 1979: 205).

If individual differences amongst children are deemed important in natural second language acquisition environments, how much more important are they likely to be in the classroom? In trying to answer this question this chapter will address the issue of age in foreign language learning from a different perspective. It will start with a contextual framework for learning a foreign language in the classroom. The question of what is required of the learner in such a context will be addressed. It will be argued that Chomsky's ideal speaker-listener who forms the subject of much of the debate on natural first and second language acquisition, does not often exist as a construct in the formal classroom, where a whole host of variables affect the learning process and where age cannot easily be isolated from other factors. It will be suggested that even if Chomsky is right in postulating innate language learning mechanisms for the acquisition of a first language and even if innate mechanisms and age-related factors play a role in the acquisition of a second language in natural contexts, they are unlikely to be sufficient for the successful learning of a foreign language within the constraints of formal learning situations where, as Chomsky stated, 'learning mechanisms other than the language faculty play a role' (1983: 110, cited in Botha, 1991).

## **4.2 Learning a Foreign Language in the Classroom**

Much has been written about possible similarities and differences between contexts in first and second language acquisition and in foreign language learning (Lightbown 1985, Chaudron 1988, Andersen 1989, Van Patten 1989, Berns 1989, Gass 1989, Kramsch 1995, Widdowson 1990).

Gass, for example, in a distinction between 'variables internal to the learner' and 'variables external to the learner' states that:

"In particular, the psycholinguistic task learners are faced with, the abilities that learners come to the learning situation with, the potential motivation they bring to the learning task do not depend on the learning situation; whether it be a foreign language classroom, a classroom in a second language environment, or so-called naturalistic 'street' learning in a second language situation."

(Gass, 1989: 35)

Chaudron (1988) and Van Patten (1989) argued that the second language acquisition context and foreign language learning context clearly needed to be distinguished. Berns (1989) developed the second language acquisition and foreign language learning dichotomy further and suggested that the degree of exposure to the target language outside the classroom influenced learning outcomes and effectively turned some foreign language learning contexts into second language acquisition contexts. In any consideration of context, the language being learned as much as the language being shared by the majority of the learners can therefore not be left out of the debate. The status of English as a lingua franca is likely to affect foreign language learning procedures and outcomes for those children who already speak English as it is for those who learn English as a foreign or second language. In this respect, primary school classrooms in England represent a special challenge.

Some children speak more than one language with native-speaker fluency but this is seldom because they have 'learned' these languages at school.

Almost 30 years ago Carroll was already questioning the common assumption that younger is better in the special conditions of learning a foreign language in the classroom:

"One of the most popular ideas is that young children learn a foreign language more readily and easily than older children or adults. This idea stems from observation of the fact that under certain conditions young children do indeed become very fluent in a second language. What is often ignored is that the conditions are rather specialized and not always easily arranged or duplicated in schools, and that even under these specialized conditions not every child learns the second language as well as his mother tongue."

(Carroll, in: Stern, 1969: 57/58).

Evidence from literature as well as from experience suggests that learning outcomes from the foreign language classroom are far from uniform and that not all children learn a foreign language with either the same degree of ease or of success. Such variations in learning outcomes, even amongst young children, would seem to suggest that those innate mechanisms and processes which govern language development in natural acquisition contexts are likely to play a much reduced role in the learning of a foreign language under the artificial constraints of the classroom.

#### **4.3 Demands on the Learner**

Lightbown & Spada (1993) provide some insight into how languages *might* be learned. How exactly foreign languages are learned in the classroom, however,

and whether all aspects of a language are learned in the same way by all learners is still open to debate. As Van Patten argued:

"How and why people acquire languages is a question which is still unanswered and will probably go unanswered for some time."  
(Van Patten, 1989: 19)

Despite this lack of consensus it would seem reasonable to assume that the task of the foreign language learner in the classroom is an enormously complex one involving biological, psychological, social and affective, personal as well as pedagogical variables. Larsen-Freeman lists some of the many interacting factors at play which are likely to determine the degree of success in learning a language:

"...the source language, the target language, the markedness of the L1, the markedness of the L2, the amount and type of input, the amount and type of interaction, the amount and type of feedback received...age, aptitude, sociopsychological factors such as motivation and attitude, personality factors, cognitive style, hemisphericity, learning strategies, sex, birth order, interests etc..." (Larsen-Freeman, 1997: 151)

Those factors which might play no role or only a limited role in spoken first language development, such as the nature of language being acquired, differences between children's background and their abilities, quality and quantity of language input, are likely to play a more important role in a learning context which is characterised by restrictions in learning and teaching time,

a limited number of role models, varying degrees of motivation and application and where learning outcomes are also influenced by specific approaches, methodologies or techniques a teacher chooses to apply. Successful foreign language learning in the classroom is likely to be the result of a complex interplay between cognitive and affective learner variables, the context, the language being learned and the pedagogy applied but, as Ellis states:

"Unfortunately, however, we do not have a very precise idea about which aspects of language learning are influenced by general cognitive processes and which ones are dependent on the language-learning faculty." (Ellis, 1985: 65)

The following sections will analyse some of the challenges and demands faced by the young foreign language learner in the primary school classroom, specifically the English-speaking classroom. It will be argued that if a young learner is to make cognitive and affective 'sense' of his learning experiences, in addition to being helped by a sound pedagogy, he will need to bring certain qualities and experiences to the learning process which will enable him to compensate to some extent for what is lacking in a context characterised by limited language input, a limited number of role models and limited opportunities for genuine communicative interactions. It will be suggested that the ability to listen and adequate attention spans, a degree of consciousness and language awareness, basic literacy skills and learning strategies, the ability to stay on task, patience and perseverance as well as enthusiasm, positive attitudes and motivation are all important ingredients in successful foreign language learning in the classroom. In discussing these issues the

writer has decided to adopt a holistic approach. No claim is made, however, that all the possible variables affecting successful foreign language learning will be treated or that those that will be treated will be dealt with in equal depth. Rather an attempt is made to analyse those substrates which would seem important for successful foreign language learning in the primary school, those that would facilitate learning as well as those which may form an impediment to learning and thus challenge the belief that younger is necessarily better for all children, in all contexts and under all circumstances.

It will be suggested that a number of factors necessary for successful learning are more likely to be present in older children than in younger children while others might be more a question of experience rather than one of age. The following sections should therefore be read as an attempt at identifying those areas where increased levels of maturity, awareness or experience are likely to lead to better results. It will be argued that the concept of age, stemming largely from first language acquisition processes, might be of much less relevance in the primary school foreign language classroom where the concept of stage might be more important and where considerations such as whether a child is literate or not, whether he possesses a degree of language awareness, whether he is able to listen and pay attention to formal instruction, whether he has positive attitudes towards the target language and the learning process, would seem to play a crucial role and where other factors such as the language being learned, teacher personality and competences, aims and objectives and a consideration of what children are learning a language for, cannot be ignored.



As has been discussed previously, many early foreign language learning programmes aim to develop communicative competence in young learners. The reader will remember that the Scottish National Pilot aims to develop communicative competence in a foreign language amongst young learners and as recently as 1997 a Council of Europe working party stated that:

"Throughout the deliberations of the 5 workshops and the research and development work undertaken in the interim, there would seem to be an almost universal consensus that children should acquire Communicative Competence through a structured, systematic approach to their learning, in terms of aims and content, appropriate methodologies, evaluation and assessment."  
(Doyé & Hurrell, 1997: 93)

The discussions that follow in subsequent sections therefore need to be read within the broad framework of developing a learner's 'communicative competence' in terms of learning a language as a system as well as how to put knowledge, understanding and skills to use.

#### **4.3.1 Consciousness and The Importance of Noticing**

Already in 1963, the editorial introduction to Belyayev's book 'The Psychology of Teaching Foreign Languages', stressed the need for a 'conscious analysis of various linguistic facts' in successful foreign language learning. Although the exact nature of the interplay between innate language specific mechanisms and general cognitive processes is still unknown and although some aspects of a language might be acquired through innate language mechanisms, possibly depending on the language pairs involved, a degree of consciousness,

language awareness and knowledge of how language works are again increasingly regarded as important factors in facilitating achievement in formal language learning contexts. Schmidt & Frota (1986) and Schmidt (1990) suggest that conscious attention to form, 'noticing' and 'attending' to features in the input are important if input is to be converted into intake in foreign language learning. Schmidt hypothesises that 'subconscious systemisation of input' is impossible and that one could not 'learn a foreign language through subliminal perception' (Schmidt, 1990: 142). For Schmidt, intake is what the learner consciously notices and noticing applies to all aspects of language, phonology, lexicon, grammatical structures and pragmatics. More recently, Van Lier (1996) emphasised that both comprehension and language output required attention to form and that consciousness and language awareness were essential ingredients in successful language learning in educational settings' (Van Lier, 1996: 69). Based on work by Vygotsky (1962) who defined consciousness as 'an awareness of the activity of the mind' and for whom consciousness included both intellectual and affective components, the key functions of consciousness are seen in 'organising, controlling and evaluating experiences'. Conscious learning is therefore not only seen as representing explicit knowledge of rules and structures:

"...outcomes or processes such as focusing attention, comprehending, memorising and creative language use require the involvement of a conscious mind (in interaction with its environment) which is aware of what it is doing and what is going on." (Van Lier, 1996: 74)

Consciousness and language awareness are assumed to enable the learner 'to override physical and biological tendencies' and 'to compensate for and cope with contextually restrictive variables' (Van Lier, 1996: 96). While a degree of behaviourist learning such as rote-learning and drilling might be necessary, the bulk of learning, Van Lier suggests, can only be accomplished by a 'conscious' person. The ability to listen and take note of formal instruction must therefore be regarded as a prerequisite for converting input into intake and for efficient and successful foreign language learning in the classroom.

#### **4.3.2 Noticing and Phonological Development**

If a child is to acquire the phonological system of a language successfully, for example, he needs to be able to identify sounds and intonation patterns and to imitate and memorise these (Carroll & Sapon, 1959). Research findings from first language development, from second language acquisition contexts and to a degree from foreign language learning referred to earlier, suggest that young children generally imitate, repeat and mimic new sounds and intonation patterns with accuracy. It is in the area of phonological development therefore, that one would expect the age factor to have the greatest influence, where conformity and universality would seem to dominate over individual differences amongst children, where the willingness to have a go and enthusiasm pay off and where younger, therefore, might indeed be better. However, even in the area of phonological development there seem to be differences amongst individual children. As has been stated in Chapter Two, not all children in the classroom acquire foreign accents with an equal degree of success.

A number of possible explanations could account for the failure of individual children in this area, neurological, biological, affective, the influence of language pairs, either typological or sociological, language interference or teacher induced 'flaws' in pronunciation; it is not within the scope of this thesis, however, to identify these.

As far back as 1966 Pimsleur, Sundland & McIntyre suggested that 20-30% of children underachieved in a foreign language because of poor auditory ability. Donaldson (1978) found that the division of speech into sounds and words was an achievement which not all children mastered with the same ease. On arrival at primary school some children had an awareness that speech could be broken down into its component parts, sounds, words and sentences, while others had little phonological awareness and were unable to discriminate between individual words in a sentence. For them, speech was simply a continuous stream of sounds. Hawkins (1981) refers to the ear as a channel for learning and states that:

"...the trick of switching off internally is learned early and habits of defensive non-listening need to be unlearned." (Hawkins, 1981: 229)

There is much anecdotal evidence suggesting that more and more children arrive at primary school unable to follow formal instruction. Finding that a growing number of children started school with 'language delay' and without the speaking and listening skills generally taken for granted, Lewisham Borough

Council recently published guidance on 'Helping Children to Talk' ('Help for late talkers', TES, May 16, 1996).

These differences in receptivity for instruction would mean that 'universals' amongst children cannot simply be assumed. An early foreign language programme would have to take into account that there will be a number of children who will not, for whatever reasons, just naturally pick up the sound system of the target language because they are biologically equipped to do so. These children will have to be taught how to 'think with the ears' as suggested by Hawkins (1981: 229) based on the work by Furth and Wachs who developed a series of discovery listening games with the intention 'to develop the child's ability to focus attention on and derive information from auditory stimuli' (cited in Hawkins, 1981: 231). Hawkins recommended that the 'education of the ear' should be one of the aims for primary school language education. On the Continent much valuable preparatory work is done in nurseries and kindergartens where first language listening skills tend to be actively and systematically developed before children start formal schooling.

#### **4.3.3 Attention Spans**

People usually, though not only, learn those things to which they pay attention. The ability to notice, the ability to pay attention and concentrate over a period of time play a key role in learning a foreign language in the classroom where teaching and learning time is limited and often very concentrated. Schmidt states that:

"...those who notice most learn most, and it may be that those who notice most are those who pay attention most as a general disposition or on a particular occasion." (Schmidt, 1990: 144)

Allwright & Bailey (1991) refer to the attentive learner as the 'receptive' learner and state that:

"...even though Krashen has suggested (for example, 1982) that language acquisition which occurs outside of conscious awareness is more effective than conscious learning...Newmark (1972) once argued that language teaching is above all a matter of getting and keeping learner's attention...and Van Lier suggested that the learner's attention is the key component which converts input into intake." (Allwright & Bailey, 1991: 169)

Attention and concentration are especially important in noticing language at the input stage when the learner makes first contact with new language material but attention and concentration are also necessary at all other stages of the learning process. Children must be able to listen actively, to concentrate and focus in order to benefit from input and they need to be attentive during tasks as time spent on task is as crucial in foreign language learning as in any other learning.

Asher & Price (1967) and Asher (1969) suggested that older learners were much more able to pay attention over periods of time. Asher tested the physical responses of child and adult English-speaking learners of Russian and found that older learners were far superior than younger ones:

"...not only did the adults dramatically outperform children on all measures of retention, but there was an inverse relationship between age and listening comprehension. Adults performed on average near the maximum score in comprehension of Russian, while second graders (age 8) were the lowest of all groups tested." (Asher, 1969: 15/16)

Asher suggested that the short attention spans of the younger children might have been responsible for their low score. A later study by Cohen & Hosenfeld (1981) investigating learners level of involvement suggests that

"Attending to content matter seemed to range at any given classroom moment from 25% to 82%, according to the age of the learner and the interest value of the material, among other things." (cited in Allwright & Bailey, 1991: 129)

Studies in child development suggest that young children generally have very short attention spans. They tend to be easily distracted, they tend to switch off easily and boredom and fatigue set in more quickly. Attention spans are subject to maturational growth. Older children tend to have better concentration and attention spans and are likely to get more out of the available target language exposure. The ability to focus on relevant information while ignoring distracting or irrelevant cues improves during the school years (Harris, 1993, Williams & Burden 1997):

"Research by developmental psychologists has shown that children's ability to focus their attention, to select what is important for them to attend to and to adapt their attention to the demands of the situation improves with age."  
(Williams & Burden, 1997: 16)

Harris (1993) reports a study by Miller (1985) which measured 'central learning' (memory of task-related items) and 'incidental learning' by asking children of different ages to focus on cards with pictures of pairs of household items and animals. It was found that when children were asked to match the animals with the household items they had appeared with on the cards (central learning), recall improved with age. Older children had been able to concentrate more efficiently on the task at hand, to attend more selectively and to block out extraneous information' (Harris, 1993: 530). These findings suggest that younger children are less likely than older children to be able to draw conclusions from limited examples and to gain maximum benefit from limited input.

#### **4.3.4 Noticing and Syntactical Development**

The successful acquisition of the sound system of a language is a necessary and important first step in language learning and the majority of young learners might indeed be good and willing imitators. However, the successful learning of a language requires more than the accurate imitation of sound and intonation patterns. If the young foreign language learner is to make progress he also needs to 'construct' the structural system of the language. Already in 1963 Belyayev argued that if the learners are to learn from language examples, rather than the examples themselves, they have to notice patterns and regularities. They need to be able to induce patterns and regularities from limited language input, they need to draw analogies and make generalisations about the language. They need to be able to recognise grammatical functions



that words fulfil in sentences and they need to be able to notice relationships in syntax and semantics. In the absence of these abilities, the learner will be reduced to *reproducing* only what he has seen or heard and fail to *produce* language appropriate to what is required.

#### **4.3.4.1 Attention to Form and Cognitive Maturity**

One of the earliest and strongest cases for adults' superiority over children in the formal aspects of language development was made by Ausubel (1964). He suggested that, although children might be 'superior to adults in acquiring acceptable accents', older learners were far better at recognising and manipulating language patterns, at making conscious grammatical generalisations and applying these. Attention to form was said to be lacking in young children who have to operate the less efficient process of learning 'through extensive repetition and corrective feedback' (Ausubel, 1964: 421). The child's 'lack of conscious attention to the formal properties of language' was also identified by Wong-Fillmore who suggested that children were not so much concerned with learning the language itself but with being accepted by their native-speaking peers. Socialising was more important than the formal properties of the language they were acquiring:

"They never seemed particularly motivated to learn the new language as they were to get along with the people who spoke it."  
(Wong-Fillmore, 1979: 208)

The claim that greater cognitive maturity allows older learners to learn a foreign language more efficiently has also been made by Burstal et al. (1974), Ervin-Tripp (1974) and Taylor (1974) who suggested that it seems logical to assume:

"...that the adult's more advanced cognitive maturity would allow him to deal with the abstract nature of language even better than children."

(Taylor 1974: 33)

Ervin-Tripp (1974) attributed the advantages of the older children in her study over the younger ones to their 'improved capacity to solve problems, to make sub-rules and to carry in mind several principles'.

Information processing capacity improves during the school years and systems for perceiving, analysing, representing and retrieving language information generally develop with age (Harris, 1993: 533). As children mature cognitively and conceptually their capacity for analytical thinking and cognitive processing improves. They become more efficient in ignoring distracting and irrelevant information, they can analyse and process language material more efficiently than younger children, their ability to solve problems and tasks increases and they can start taking those shortcuts which are important in a learning context where time is a precious commodity. The formal thinker is able to acquire concepts from verbal rather than concrete experiences, he has a meta-awareness of language and ideas, he can see relationships between ideas, he can manipulate ideas and he can use abstract rules to solve problems.

Walsh & Diller (1981:16) suggest that 'cognitive aptitudes continue to raise markedly after puberty and that grammatical sensitivity and grammatical reasoning in particular seem to develop into a new stage at puberty'.

It is, however, essential to remember that the development of analytical procedures will not occur at the same pace in all children. As Elkind (1981) argued the stage of formal operations, relating to the ability to think abstractly, to form general rules and to arrive at conclusions on the basis of argument is not reached at the same time by everyone nor does everyone necessarily attain it. Studies in child development also suggest that children of the same age display varying degrees in their ability for 'analytical processing' of spoken language as well as in their 'metalinguistic awareness' (Donaldson 1978, Wells 1981, 1985). A study by Green (1975), for example, found major differences amongst 11 year old children in their ability to analyse patterns in a foreign language, Swedish in this case. It has already been stated that some of the younger children whom Burstall et al. (1974) called the 'more able' wanted to learn the 'formal aspects' of language, were bored with endless repetition and wanted to know 'what they were learning and why they were learning it'. That children differed widely in their ability to deal with the formal aspects of language was also reported from the Scottish National Pilot.

#### **4.3.4.2 Language Awareness**

Similarities between 'insight into pattern' and 'language awareness' are discussed by Hawkins (1981) who provides an extensive discussion of the role

of language awareness in a comprehensive programme of language education for school children (Hawkins, 1984). Donaldson's work suggests that 'language awareness' has to be learned and that a child's ability to analyse language is likely to be the result of a relationship between both age and background. In some homes an awareness of language is more explicitly fostered through rhymes, language play, games and stories and the quality of the dialogue between the child and an adult, as discussed in Chapter Two, seems crucial.

Wong-Fillmore (1979) found that syntactical play was indicative of children's awareness of structural matters and that those who engaged in experimental syntactic play with the English language made most progress. One child in particular seemed quick in analysing language formulae, for example, and in working out which parts could be varied:

"Nora's rapid analysis of formulas had a correlate in her disposition to figure out how toys, games, and gadgets were put together, and how they worked. She was constantly playing with things and taking them apart and her doing so with linguistic structures was consistent with her overall approach to whatever she came across " (Wong-Fillmore, 1979: 225)

Another child seemed especially good at mimicry, at remembering and precisely reproducing formulas but this child did not make as much progress:

"...he had a talent for recognizing and picking up memorable and useful expressions. But these abilities alone were insufficient for rapid progress in learning the new language." (Wong-Fillmore 1979: 226)

The least successful children were those who analysed little, stuck to a formula or avoided speaking English altogether. Depending on their linguistic environment, some children have already developed a greater degree of metalinguistic awareness than others when they start school. Wels (1981) suggested that when a child started formal schooling this 'awareness' or 'knowledge of literacy' was the most important predictor of educational attainment. Children who started school with positive pre-school experiences, with an idea of what language was about, what books looked like, with an awareness that what they heard at a phonological level related to symbols on paper, for example, were clearly ahead in their language development and, to a large extent, stayed ahead during their primary school years.

When children begin to learn a foreign language in a school environment the move from a largely unconscious approach in their spoken first language development to a largely conscious approach would seem inevitable. In such a context, children with a degree of language awareness, with some 'knowledge about language' and an understanding of language as a system would seem to be at an advantage. The ability to distinguish the word as an arbitrary label from the object it denotes, for example is regarded as crucial in dealing with language as a formal system (Turner, Pratt & Herriman, 1984). Some children might not develop this ability until the age of 10 or eleven.

Hawkins (1981: 227) states that 'lack of preparation in awareness of language and insight into pattern on which depends the ability to process incoming

messages rapidly' might explain why some children fail to learn foreign languages successfully. Differences between individual children might be partially explained by differences in general cognitive abilities, by previous language experiences or by language specific abilities rather than by age; as a result children of the same chronological age might not be equally ready for those aspects of foreign language learning which require attention to the formal properties of language. For some children 'formal' foreign language study might hold both interest and challenge while for others attending to formal aspects of language might seem a fruitless exercise. Categorical statements that all children of a similar age are collectively able or unable to deal with formal aspects of foreign language learning would therefore seem to be ill-conceived. Offering a foreign language from a specific age thus presents a considerable challenge in a school system which is largely based on chronological ages rather than stages.

#### **4.3.4.3 Language Awareness as a 'Spin-off'**

It has been argued that a degree of language awareness would seem a prerequisite for successful foreign language learning in a school context. In return this learning can have a positive influence on children's general language development and stimulate growth in their language awareness. As is argued in a chapter in Brumfit (1995) on 'language awareness' or 'knowledge about language' in language education, the National Curriculum recommendations for language awareness in both English and Modern Languages took little account of a Vygotskian perspective of language development.

For Vygotsky, interaction and reflectiveness play central roles in language development and in the context of foreign language learning he argued that the learning of such a language helped the child in mastering the 'higher forms', phonetic and syntactical, of his first language:

"The child learns to see his language as one particular system among many, to view its phenomena under more general categories, and this leads to awareness of his linguistic operations." (Vygotsky, 1962: 109)

A study reported by Pinto, Taeschner & Titone (1996) also points to the potential benefits of a more 'reflective' approach to language learning. This study was carried out amongst Patois-Italian speaking children from low socio-economic and socio-cultural backgrounds. They were taught a Patois, their home dialect and Italian, the official language of the region, as well as English on a daily basis. Work focused on themes that were common to all three languages including images, songs and rhymes and written language was introduced in all three languages from the beginning with pupils comparing pronunciation and orthography patterns. When children were assessed in comparison to a control group who had attended a monolingual curriculum only, researchers found that:

"...those who had followed a more demanding linguistic curriculum, entailing a high risk of possible interferences and confusions among different code systems, were in fact superior in Italian metalinguistic tasks to those who only attended an Italian curriculum " (Pinto et al., 1996: 44)

A study like the one reported by Pinto suggests that all children, regardless of their background, can benefit from working with language as long as this work has a cognitive component and goes beyond the 'mindless' repetition of phrases they do not understand. However, these 'spin-offs' from working with language should not be confused with learning a foreign language per se. No claims were made in the above study that such comparative work led, for example, to increased 'production competence' in English.

#### **4.3.5 First Language Literacy Skills and Effective Classroom Foreign Language Learning**

An awareness of language is presumed to be a precondition for learning to read and write and the ability to read and write would in itself seem important in a context where teaching and learning time is limited. In most subjects within the school education system, intake of information and the efficiency with which children learn is very much a question of their reading ability and learning a foreign language is no exception. Good foundations in first language skills, including the ability to read and write, would seem important in learning a foreign language efficiently and successfully in the classroom where teaching and learning time are limited. Cummins' 'interdependence hypothesis' (1979) postulates that the extent of children's command of first language literacy skills and a sound basis in cognitive and conceptual development in a first language will affect their progress in a second language. Cummins & Swain (1986) argued that children should be given the opportunity to develop a sound basis in their first language as this would give the child:



"...the social-emotional environment in which the basic conditions for learning can occur and in which the linguistic and cognitive development in the first language will support the same in the second language."

(Cummins & Swain, 1986: 105)

Cummins differentiates between context-embedded 'Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills' (BICS) and context-reduced 'Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency' (CALP). According to Cummins, CALP refers 'to those aspects of language which are closely related to the development of literacy skills in L1 and L2' (Cummins, 1980: 177). The literacy-related aspects of language competence were identified as vocabulary, conceptual knowledge, metalinguistic awareness and the ability to deal with decontextualised spoken and written language.

While most children develop context-embedded 'BICS' with relative ease, context-reduced 'CALP' is said to take longer to develop and is not developed to the same degree by all children. It is the CALP, the cognitive and academic abilities that take on importance in formal learning situations where they are closely related to children's ability to read and write. Cummins suggested that cognitive maturity was an asset in dealing with the context-reduced activities that are characteristic of school learning and that first language literacy-related instruction was associated with improved second language performance in literacy related tasks (Cummins & Swain, 1986)

Titone's work on early bilingual reading as a support to bilingual development seems to confirm Cummins' hypothesis

"...of the correlation between early reading and oral proficiency on one side, and cognitive development on the other." (reported in Pinto, 1996: 28/9)

Successful foreign language learning in a school environment would seem to depend on children's level of cognitive maturity as well as on their first language skills. It is not within the scope of this thesis to enter further into the debate on literacy and whether literacy develops different modes of thinking (for an extensive discussion see Olson, Torrance & Hildyard, 1985). For the purpose of learning a foreign language within the artificial constraints of the classroom, however, being able to read and write would seem very important for a number of reasons. Pre-literate children for whom language is very much context-embedded and who can only function in the here and now (Donaldson, 1978) are unlikely to be very efficient learners in the classroom where much language learning is 'decontextualised' in the sense that language is not often supported by the contextual 'here and now' clues. While pre-literate children might cope with some aspect of foreign language learning with relative ease, such as repetition and imitation based on spoken language only, they are likely to find other aspects of foreign language learning more difficult. The ability to read, however, provides the child with an additional medium for language input and written language 'provides the child with much more favourable opportunities':

"...for becoming aware of language in its own right than his earlier encounters with the spoken word are likely to have done." (Donaldson 1978: 91)

Donaldson states further that 'those features of the written word which encourage awareness of language may also encourage awareness of one's own thinking and be relevant to the development of intellectual self-control'.

Written language allows children to notice patterns and regularities and it gives them insights into how language works and how it is structured. The permanent nature of written language allows the child to conceptualise, categorise and organise language.

Snow, Hoefnagel & Höhle (1978) provided evidence that literacy skills were crucial in syntactical development and argued that the ability to read and write was the reason why both adults and school aged children outperformed children under five. Written language used in formal teaching contexts inevitably focuses on form and through its permanent nature allows the child to pay attention to the structural properties of language, to focus on patterns and to form and test hypotheses in his own time.

Being able to read would thus seem crucial in enabling children to break down language chunks into their component parts to disassemble language in order to reassemble. Breaking down language chunks from spoken language only can be very difficult, if not impossible, given the restrictions of the classroom. In the case of a language like French, for example where certain aspects of grammar are only realised through written language, exposure to written language would seem important if children are to develop an accurate understanding of language patterns. Written language can help to clarify

possible misunderstandings such as 'le information' and 'l'information', it can help to clarify adjective agreements that might not be pronounced and it can help clarify spoken similarities but structural differences between 'Je' and 'J'ai', for example. Many cognates shared between the English and French language, such as table and 'la table', are also more easily recognised in written language than in speech. In the case of learning the English language, for example, the writer can report from personal experience numerous reading and writing activities that focused exclusively on the distinction between 'their' and 'there'.

In addition to providing a day to day link between experiences and providing the child with a record of what has been taught and learnt, written language, through its permanent nature, aids concentration and facilitates, supports and reinforces memory (Hornsey, 1993, 1994). Without written language burden on memory can be heavy and learning a slow and cumbersome process.

Burstall (1970) had reported that many children complained that they could not remember words unless they saw them written down and, consequently, experienced considerable difficulty during the oral phase of learning.

Krashen & Terrell in a reference to the role of written language suggested that:

"...it normally took three or four times as long to teach the material without the aid of orthography." (Krashen & Terrell, 1988: 15)

Being able to read and write also frees the learner from the teacher or the 'tape' as the only input source and creates scope for autonomous learning, independent from the teacher and at the learner's own pace.

Children of the same chronological age clearly vary in the development of their first language literacy skills as these skills are 'learned' and 'taught' rather than 'caught'. Context-embedded language is largely a direct reflection of experience but the skills and capacities needed to deal with de-contextualised language are different from those involved when language simply arises from concrete situations. Some children find the transition from what Bruner (1967) called 'communicative' to 'analytic' competence difficult as they seem to be unable to dis-embed their thinking from the context of immediate activity.

Torrance & Olson (1985) suggest that an important component of the ability to deal with decontextualised language is the ability to distance oneself from language, to comment on language, to encode propositions and to comment on these. They suggested that children differ in these abilities and that the differences between them were displayed in their ability to use 'psychological verbs' such as 'think' or 'know'.

Hawkins (1984) comments on the possible relationship between children's background and their reading attainment and suggests that children from less advantaged backgrounds do not always have the opportunity:

"...for uninterrupted dialogue with an adult who can give the child individual attention at the critical age when the child is learning to match his expanding conceptual universe to the linguistic symbols of the mother tongue."  
(Hawkins, 1984: 14)

Those children who are the better readers are likely to make the better language learners as both reading and foreign language learning require children to infer meaning in frequently 'decontextualised' situations and those children who experience difficulties in their first language literacy skills often experience difficulties in learning a foreign language in the formal classroom. It has already been reported in Chapter Three that it is precisely at the stage when written language is introduced that some children start to experience problems with the foreign language.

For effective foreign language learning in the classroom a degree of literacy would therefore seem essential. The young child who has not mastered at least basic first language literacy skills, is likely to find foreign language learning very burdensome, often frustrating and eventually demotivating. Any suggestions that, in the classroom, 'younger is better' and that children should learn a foreign language from the generally 'pre-literate' age of five must therefore be regarded as ill-conceived. In fact, the time when children start primary school is the time when, in addition to the emotional upset of being separated from their parents, many children have to make the transition from spoken to written language in their first language and often from dialect to standard 'norms'.

It is very likely that for many this time is the worst time to start 'learning' a foreign language.

Recognising the crucial role of sound first language skills in foreign language learning, the Danish education authorities have decided to introduce English from the age of nine to ten when it is deemed that most children have a solid foundation in their first language skills (TES, 17 May 1996 and personal discussions between the writer and the Danish Ministry of Education).

It seems to be important to report in this context, however, that schools in Denmark do not teach formal reading and writing before the age of seven. In countries where formal teaching of reading and writing skills takes place earlier, children might well be 'ready' earlier for classroom foreign language work. In England, the Government's new 'literacy hour' which is intended to focus on language work at the word, sentence and text level including phonics and spelling should provide children with at least some of the foundations necessary for successful foreign language study. Hawkins already stated in the early 1980s that between one third and a half of those children starting to learn a foreign language simply lack the 'tools' necessary for successful language learning in the classroom.

#### **4.3.6 Memory**

The learner in the foreign language classroom has to be able to memorise a considerable amount of language material in a short time and young children are often said to have 'good memories'. However, already in the 1960s Stern

stated that the frequently expressed view that 'young children have a better memory than older ones find little support in psychological literature' (Stern, 1967: 117). Studies in child development suggest that young, pre-literate children forget quickly and that their recall is deficient. Studies by Leontiev (1981) have shown that memory improves with age and 'natural memory', prevalent in the very young and pre-literate, is gradually replaced by a more abstract and logical type of memory which develops with cognitive maturity. Harris states that older children also have a better understanding of how memory works:

"Older children are also more likely to use *elaboration*, a memory aid that relies on visual imagery, and verbal aids (like acronyms) to enhance memory."  
(Harris, 1993: 531)

John-Steiner in discussing a Vygotskian perspective on bilingualism suggests that 'better memory storage and a more fully developed conceptual system' give older children and adolescents an advantage over the 'highly imitative younger children' learning a second language (John-Steiner, 1985: 350). Better memory storage capacity and the ability to retain more input was also found to be the reason for the adolescents outperforming the younger children in the study by Ramirez & Politzer (1978: 331).

Literacy skills are said to play a crucial role in the development of more advanced forms of memory and the importance of being able to read and write in foreign language development in the classroom has already been discussed.



#### **4.3.7 Learning Strategies**

A considerable amount of literature exists on learning strategies (Rubin 1975, Naiman, Froehlich, Stern & Todesco 1978, Wenden & Rubin 1987, Skehan 1989, O'Malley & Chamot 1990, Oxford 1990, Wenden 1991, MacIntyre 1994, Ehrman & Oxford 1995, for example) suggesting that an awareness of the learning process and the application of strategies, conscious or unconscious, is necessary for successful language learning. Ehrman & Oxford (1989) defined strategies as 'the steps taken by the learner to facilitate the acquisition, storage, retrieval and use of information' and Oxford defined strategies more precisely as:

"...specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations." (Oxford, 1990: 8)

MacIntyre (1994) suggested that the use of a strategy depended on the learner's awareness of an appropriate strategy, a reason to use it or a reason not to use it. Such an awareness, according to MacIntyre, is related to a learner's intelligence, his aptitude and previous language learning experience. McLaughlin (1984) in a reference to the work by Olson & Samuels (1973) argued that younger children lacked precisely such an awareness and that the performance deficits found in younger children were due to:

"...their failure to organize, plan, monitor, and integrate their information processing and memory as efficiently as do older children or adults."  
(McLaughlin, 1984: 22)

Harris (1983: 532) reported that eight year old children when asked to remember a list of 18 items, rehearsed by repeating the last thing they saw or heard whereas eleven and thirteen year old children rehearsed the complete list, adding each new word or item to the end of the list. The rehearsal strategy of the older children seemed far superior to that of the younger children who remembered a much smaller percentage of items. Older children are said to use more thorough and systematic visual strategies, they spontaneously use rehearsal strategies to improve memory and they generally organise material for understanding and remembering in a more efficient way. They also seem to be more realistic in their assessment of the difficulty of a particular task.

Chesterfield & Barrows-Chesterfield (1985) examined the development of second language learning strategies among Mexican children in bilingual pre-school and first grade classrooms in the USA. They found that strategies formed an important part of verbal interactions in bilingual classrooms and that increased proficiency in the second language was linked to an increase in the use of strategies both in range and complexity. Their study also showed that those strategies which require a degree of metalinguistic awareness and those which are likely to sustain a conversation generally developed with age but were not employed by all children. Individual differences between children were found in both the rate of development of strategies as well as in their application. On a scale ranging from repetition, memorisation and formulaic language at the bottom to monitoring and requesting clarification at the top, the 'bottom' strategies such as repetition and memorising were used by most

children, while those requiring a degree of metalinguistic awareness and those likely to sustain a conversation were the last to be developed and 'exhibited by only a few children at the end of the first grade'. These findings suggest that metacognitive strategies, such as being able to control, to co-ordinate, to plan and evaluate the learning process, are more likely to be present in older learners. However, it would seem important to add that Olson also suggested that younger children can employ strategies that will help them in dealing with language material, but that they would have to be prompted to do so or in Hawkin's (1981) words, that they would need to be 'given the tools'.

Chesterfield & Barrows-Chesterfield (1985: 57) also emphasised the 'importance of socio-psychological variables in the choice of strategies' as many children used what they called 'avoidance' or 'reduction' strategies. Older children on the other hand, seem to be more prepared to ask for help than younger children, which suggests a greater awareness of 'what might be wrong' (Scarcella & Higa, 1982).

#### **4.3.7.1 Social Strategies**

Wong-Fillmore reported from her own study (1979) that children employed 'social strategies' such as 'join a group and pretend to know what was going on even if you do not', or 'give the impression with a few words that you know the language' or 'count on your friends for help'. However, she also reported differences between children relating to their approaches to the learning task:

"One of the most critical ways in which they differed was in having the social skills required to make use of the social strategies..."  
(Wong-Fillmore, 1979: 220)

Wong-Fillmore's study was carried out in a naturalistic setting with mainly context-embedded language use where children did not talk about 'displaced' events or topics. However, these differences amongst children quite clearly suggest that learning a second language even in naturalistic settings, is not a totally uniform process and that while some might do rather well others struggle.

Social strategies, however, take on a different role in the foreign language classroom. Children's social problems identified by Wong-Fillmore such as 'how to get along for a while without a common language' and 'how to get your friends to help and provide input' exist to a much lesser extent in a foreign language classroom where most of the children share a language they can resort to in order to overcome any problems. The English speaking child learning French for example does not need to use French to socialise with his peers. In such a context metacognitive and cognitive strategies, such as defined by O'Malley & Chamot (1990) and by Oxford (1990) as controlling, planning and evaluating the learning process, directing and selecting attention, self-monitoring and evaluation, note-taking, reasoning, deduction, recombination and summarising, would seem rather more important than social ones.

#### **4.3.8 Past Experience and World Knowledge**

Larsen-Freeman (1985: 434) states that the more we know about the learner the more we will know about the nature of the language input he is likely to receive. A learner's age, socio-economic background, target language proficiency, gender, opportunities for interaction with target language speakers and the conditions under which learning takes place are all deemed important.

Knowledge of the world would seem equally important. The interpretation of language material, spoken and written, demands both schematic knowledge of the world and systemic knowledge of the language (Widdowson, 1978, 1990). Greater extra-linguistic knowledge helps to make input comprehensible (Krashen & Terrell, 1988: 47). What a child already knows affects what he can learn and what he can remember and past experience and world knowledge also allow for purposeful and goal-orientated learning. Past experience and knowledge therefore determine to some extent success in foreign language learning. A child's prior experience and knowledge, be it in the form of language awareness, literacy skills, knowledge of another language or world knowledge will affect the way the child interprets and converts language data into input. Young children often do not bring much previous knowledge to the language learning process. Knowledge of the world of those at the pre-literate stage, of those at the concrete stage who can only function in the here and now and who need 'concrete' learning experiences, can be limited. These children generally do not have the schematic knowledge to recognise similarities between contexts, for example, important in successful foreign language

learning. Anderson & Lynch state that children are often less than fully effective speakers of their own language:

"...partly because they do not appreciate the listener's point of view or current state of knowledge." (Anderson & Lynch, 1989: 16)

Ausubel (1964) claimed that it was the greater experience in their first language that gave older learners an advantage over children in the area of vocabulary development. Ervin-Tripp (1974) suggested that the older children in her study had a 'fuller semantic system' and therefore 'merely needed to discover a new symbolic representation'. Skehan argued that the ability to use previous syntactic, semantic and pragmatic knowledge to analyse incoming language

"...may well be a very basic one which carries over into the learning of a foreign language." (Skehan, 1989: 31)

Through their wider experience and background knowledge more mature learners are likely to have access to a wider semantic and pragmatic knowledge base in the interpretation of incoming language material than the younger learner. This wider knowledge base also allows for increased discourse competence and for better management of conversations. It was already stated in Chapter Two that Scarcella & Higa (1982) found that older children were much better at managing conversations, at keeping conversations going, at getting native-speakers to modify their input and at negotiating meaning.

A 'tabula rasa' might be a 'good thing' in arousing initial levels of interest and motivation. However, a linguistic and cognitive 'tabula rasa' is unlikely to facilitate speedy and efficient learning in the classroom nor is it likely to sustain successful learning over time. The importance of literacy skills in formal second language learning has already been emphasised. Literacy skills also help to increase children's schematic knowledge thus broadening their base for efficient processing of language material.

#### **4.4 Affective Considerations**

A body of research suggests that affective variables, such as positive attitudes and motivation (Gardner & Lambert, 1972 ), the ability to empathise (Schumann, 1975, 1978), a low affective filter (Krashen, 1982) and low levels of anxiety (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope 1986) influence learning outcomes and that successful foreign language learning is not simply a question of cognition but one of cognition and affect or of 'cognition plus' (Ehrman & Oxford, 1995).

McIntyre (1994) emphasised the importance of 'affective strategies' in regulating one's emotions, motives and attitudes. The young language learner therefore needs more than cognitive abilities, literacy skills, a degree of language awareness and learning strategies to be successful. He also needs to be positive about the learning process and motivated to learn.

#### 4.4.1 Empathy

Being able to empathise with the speakers of the target language is generally considered a vital ingredient in successful second language acquisition.

Exchanging one's own native culture for a different culture does indeed require a degree of empathy, adaptability, flexibility and a desire to integrate in the first place. Schumann's 'acculturation theory' originated from a natural second language acquisition context, however, and the relation between his theory and language learning success has already been questioned in Chapter Two. In the context of foreign language learning Hawkins states that:

"Learning a foreign language...makes heavy demands on empathy. The learner is required not only to show interest in the foreigner and his way of life, as in a geography or history lesson, but to *behave* like the foreigner, making the foreigner's ridiculous noises out loud for his mates to hear."

(Hawkins, 1981: 189)

As far as not worrying about 'making foreign noises' goes, younger is generally assumed to be better although it will be shown later in the context of the two case studies that in a classroom even young children can be 'worried' about speaking aloud in front of others. Affective variables therefore take on a very different role in the foreign language classroom where successful learning is likely to be a matter of both cognition and affect. In the foreign language classroom there is often little need for children to empathise with the speakers and the culture or cultures of any particular language. As Ringboem argued:



"Since the foreign language learner's whole personality is not involved in the learning process in the same way as in the second language learner's, most social and affective factors lose at least some of their importance in a foreign language learning context. Culture shock is hardly experienced at all, until the learner goes to the foreign country." (Ringbom, 1987: 29)

In the classroom some children might display positive attitudes and empathy towards the speakers of a target language for personal reasons such as regular holidays or personal and family connections. Others, however, might have little reason or need to empathise and what might be classified as 'empathy' might well be a case of neutrality or even ignorance as many young children are often unaware that a specific culture or group of people even exists or, if they are aware of its existence, know very little about it. And why should children in the English primary school classroom have a general desire to be like the native-speakers of the language they are learning unless they are likely to integrate closely with the target culture? Burstall et al. (1974) suggested that levels of empathy declined as children grew older, especially amongst boys, but the possibility that this was the result of their limited experience of success in learning French cannot be excluded.

Theories from child development (Garvey, 1977, 1991, Harris, 1993) suggest that the ability to empathise and to take another person's perspective is closely linked to the ability of inductive reasoning and therefore increases with age. Children need to apply inductive reasoning when learning rules and operations but inductive reasoning is also said to be important in developing empathy:

"On an interpersonal level, inductive reasoning forms the foundation for empathy." (Harris, 1993: 525)

Up to the age of about eight the child is said to 'decentre' gradually from his initial egocentrism in thought and social life and to become increasingly more able:

"...to take the perspective of other persons, to understand not only that they may perceive, feel and think differently from the way he does, but also to interpret their actions in different situations and to arrive at an understanding of what they may perceive, feel or think." (Garvey, 1991: 9)

If this is the case, then the commonly held assumption that younger is better also becomes questionable from a 'cultural' and 'empathetic' point of view.

Sharpe states that:

"English children should not grow up equating being human with being British...and this lesson is best learned as young as possible."  
(Sharpe, 1992: 13)

One has to agree with the view that 'English children should not grow up equating being human with being British'. Whether what needs to be learned in this context can be learned from a very young age, however, remains questionable if one takes the above findings from child development into account. It could be argued, on the other hand, that a decline in empathy during adolescence suggests that a starting age just before or around adolescence is ill-judged. However, a decline in empathy at adolescence might

support arguments in favour of a preparatory programme which challenges stereotypes and cultural prejudices rather than an early start in a particular language as such. Whether cultural issues need to be learned, or even are best learned, through the foreign language, especially in the initial stages, would seem to be questionable. Extensive research by Byram (1989, 1997) suggests that simply exposing children to a foreign language does not necessarily change children's attitude towards a culture and the speakers of its language. Teaching which is largely based on survival tourist transactions can also reinforce rather than eliminate cultural stereotypes and prejudices.

#### **4.4.2 Low Affective Filters**

Krashen & Terrell (1988: 19) argued that a positive attitude towards speakers of the target language resulted in a low 'affective filter' which in itself is said to result in less inhibition and a lower degree of self-consciousness in the learner. Learners with low affective filters are assumed to be more prepared to take risks and less worried about making mistakes or failing. Children are said to have low affective filters and to be less inhibited and self-conscious than more mature learners. These attributes are likely to benefit the learner who finds himself in a natural context where the less inhibited learners are more likely to seek contact with target language speakers and are therefore likely to obtain more language input. In the classroom, however, low affective filters take on a different status. That filters are said to rise during adolescence has already been discussed.

Whether 'low affective filters' are common amongst all children learning a foreign language in the first place will be discussed in Chapters Five and Six in the context of the two case studies.

#### **4.4.3 Feelings of Self-worth**

Studies from child development suggest that after the age of seven children tie their performance to feelings of self-worth. Children younger than seven tend not to care about making a mistake as they do not believe that making a mistake reflects on their personality (Harris, 1993: 532). Older children are said to be bothered about their performance, they are said to try and maximise positive outcomes to avoid appearing 'stupid' or 'incompetent'. Studies from child development also suggest that young children might not know that they do not understand something or that something is incomplete or unclear. Instead, 'they just nod and move on without asking questions or looking for more information'. Older children are more likely to realise that something is unclear, they are more likely to stop and look puzzled and to 'identify the source of the confusion' (Harris, 1993: 559). It would seem likely that the characteristics of older children might help them in learning a foreign in the classroom.

Whether all young children do not worry about making mistakes and whether 'not wanting to make a mistake' is solely a question of age or whether in the classroom other variables are also at play will be discussed in Chapters Five and Six.

#### **4.4.4 Motivation**

As has been argued, both first and second language development are supported by a basic need to communicate. Language is needed to make sense of the world and to cope and interact with the environment and language is used for real purposes. The same cannot be said for the learning of a foreign language in the classroom where any definite needs to communicate in the target language are generally absent. Children who start learning a foreign language at school already have a language system through which they can communicate and make sense of their environment. The absence of this 'need' for a new language and the need to communicate in that new language ( the absence of the 'force' of the speech act as defined by Austin) is likely to be one of the crucial differences between first or second language acquisition and the child learning a foreign language in the classroom. Whether the foreign language learner in the classroom can ever be as motivated as the child acquiring his first language remains doubtful. As Hawkins (1981: 205) argued, the excitement of learning the time in a first language, 'divided into hours, minutes and seconds' and the possibilities this opened up, is unlikely to be repeated in a second language. Having already conceptualised parts of the world, renaming these concepts and objects in a foreign language is hardly a journey of discovery. In fact, as Hawkins argued, it can be a relatively boring undertaking for the young language learner.

The literature on motivation, most notably the seminal work by Gardner & Lambert (1972) suggests that motivation is closely linked to the social and

cultural context of language learning. However, levels of motivation are also related to the extent to which foreign language learning per se and a foreign language in particular is seen as relevant and useful by the learner. Gardner & Lambert suggest that the learner with integrative motivation wants to learn the target language to meet, to talk to and possibly become like the speaker of the target language. Second language acquisition contexts tend to provide the learner with some immediate payoffs in terms of increased social interaction and integration into the target culture thus sustaining motivation. However, why should the school child learning a foreign language well removed from any immediate needs invest time and effort? High levels of motivation, extrinsic or intrinsic are much more difficult to achieve or sustain in the classroom where there is no apparent need and no apparent reason for learning a particular language and where payoffs can be very limited. There is much anecdotal reference to children's early enthusiasm and positive attitudes but sooner or later, when foreign language learning starts to become 'work' and 'success' is not within every one's immediate reach, initially high levels of enthusiasm might start to wear out. Perseverance and goal-orientation then become crucial for success. A cognitive approach to motivation, which implies a degree of reasoning and conscious decision making on behalf of the learner, is more likely to sustain motivation and to lead to a period of sustained effort in order to achieve a desired goal. Young children who live in the here and now can often not see the relevance of particular processes and activities. More mature learners with higher levels of conceptual development are more likely to recognise the value, significance and relevance of particular procedures and

tasks. They will depend less on immediate payoffs and are more likely to have the ability to conceptualise long-term goals and objectives, adhere to these and work towards these. Older learners who consciously decide to learn a language are usually motivated and they possibly have some personal experience of the target culture, its language and its speakers or simply see mastering a new language as a challenge.

#### **4.5 Foreign Language Aptitude**

The chapter would not be complete without a brief consideration of the notion of foreign language aptitude despite the controversy that surrounds the concept and the tests set to measure it (Krashen & Terrell, 1988, Skehan 1988, Parry & Stansfield, 1990). Nearly forty years ago Carroll and Sapon (1959) proposed four components for foreign language aptitude:

phonetic coding ability - an ability to identify distinct sounds, to form associations between those sounds and symbols representing them, and to retain these associations;

grammatical sensitivity - the ability to recognize the grammatical functions of words (or other linguistic entities) in sentence structures;

rote learning ability for foreign language materials - the ability to learn associations between sounds and meanings rapidly and efficiently, and to retain these associations; and

inductive language learning ability - the ability to infer or induce the rules governing a set of language materials, given samples of language materials that permit such inferences. (Carroll, in Diller, 1981: 105)

Carroll later stated that foreign language aptitude as measured by the Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT) consisted of some:

"...special cognitive talent or group of talents that is largely independent of intelligence and operates independently of the motivations and attitudes of the learner." (Carroll, 1981: 94)

More recently, Skehan (1989) argued that for the concept of foreign language aptitude to be justifiable, it would have to be different from general intelligence and cognitive abilities. Parry & Stansfield (1990), however, suggested that aptitude tests, the MLAT and Pimsleur's Language Aptitude Battery (1966) did not measure any specific foreign language aptitude but measured only indirectly related qualities such as general verbal intelligence, analytical skills or test-taking ability. Krashen & Terrell (1988: 40) questioned the relevance of aptitude in second language acquisition and suggested that aptitude related to formal learning only. As acquisition took precedence over learning, attitudinal factors were regarded as more important than aptitude:

"Having high aptitude makes you a good learner but not necessarily a good acquirer. This may be an asset but is certainly not sufficient for success in second language acquisition. On the other hand, a high aptitude does seem to predict success in a language classroom which is grammar-based and on tests that demand grammatical analysis rather than real communicative ability."  
(Krashen & Terrell, 1988: 40)

It might well be the case that the relative importance of aptitude in acquisition and learning contexts is a question of degree depending on the variables under



discussion. However, despite the controversy surrounding the concept of aptitude and aptitude tests, foreign language aptitude is still seen as the main (if not the only) predictor of foreign language learning success in the classroom.

In a fairly broad definition of aptitude Carroll stated that he had:

"...no hard evidence that would impel me to disagree with the idea that foreign language aptitude, considered as the individual's initial state of readiness and capacity for learning a foreign language, and probable degree of facility in doing so, is crucially dependent upon past learning experiences. Yet, what evidence I have suggests that foreign language aptitude is relatively fixed over long periods of an individual's life span, and relatively hard to modify in any significant way." (Carroll, 1981: 86)

Skehan suggested that aptitude was consistently the most successful predictor of language learning success and that:

"...failure to include some attempt to measure aptitude will render the interpretation of any research study very difficult." (Skehan, 1989: 39)

More recently Ehrman & Oxford (1995) suggested that the Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT) continues to correlate with overall learning success at more or less the same levels as it did in the heyday of audio-lingual training:

"...suggesting that, as Carroll and Sapon (1959) proposed, the MLAT may be addressing learning abilities that are independent of methodology."  
(Ehrman & Oxford, 1995: 77)

A possible relationship between first language development, foreign language aptitude and foreign language achievement was investigated by Skehan (1988)

in follow up research to Wells' Bristol Project. In this research aptitude was defined as a 'hybrid', 'combining both a language processing ability as well as the capacity to handle decontextualised material' with both these components regarded as important for language learning success (Skehan, 1988: 52).

The results of the study suggested a correlation between children's first language development at the age of three and a half and language aptitude at secondary school at the age of 13 and 14:

"...children who make more rapid development learning their own language seem, according to conventional tests, to do better learning foreign languages in schools." (Skehan, 1988: 29)

Results of this research were not totally conclusive but suggested that first language development was significantly related to foreign language aptitude with the clearest relationship being between a child's rate in first language syntactical development and in the use of auxiliary verbs. In other words, those children whose syntactical first language development was most rapid tended to be those with higher foreign language aptitude. Results also suggested that foreign language aptitude was significantly related to foreign language achievement but that the correlation between first language development and foreign language achievement was fairly low, possibly as a result of the many intervening variables at work.

Hawkins (1981) had suggested that the concept of 'ability' could not be separated from children's background and Wells' Bristol Study had already

shown that differences in children's ability in the use of disembedded language, for example, were related to family background. A consideration whether foreign language aptitude is any different from the presence of certain desiderata such as the ability to disembed language, acuity of hearing and systematic learning skills, for example would therefore not seem out of place.

#### **4.6 Quality of the Home Environment and Parental Encouragement**

In the context of the follow up research to the Bristol study Skehan (1988:18) suggested that the highest relationship between first language development and foreign language achievement seem to exist in the growth of comprehension and vocabulary in first language development and that 'the biographical/demographic variables such as family background, parental literacy, amount the child is read to, parental education, frequently enter into higher relationships'. Research in Holland supplied similar findings on the importance of children's background in foreign language achievement:

"What does affect the learning process is the home environment of the children. The socio-economic status of the parents seems to be a significant factor." (Edelenbos & Suhre, 1996: 56)

Similar findings from Plowden, the Pilot Scheme and the Scottish National Pilot have already been discussed. Family background might therefore be a reliable predictor in children's ability to deal with literacy related language activities although, as Skehan argues, it might not be social class in itself that is relevant

but 'rather the social class correlate of familiarity and facility with decontextualised material which is relevant' (Skehan, 1988: 49).

#### **4.6.1 Social Skills**

Holmes (1978) stressed the importance of socio-linguistic skills in school learning and stated that:

"Some children may be exposed in the home to aspects of the socio-linguistic competence they will be required to demonstrate in the classroom."  
(Holmes, 1978: 145)

Some children are likely to have acquired discourse skills such as the rules of turn-taking, for example, which are important in all contexts not just school foreign language learning, while others might have much scope for development in this area. As will be seen during the discussions of classroom observations in Chapters Five and Six, there are a number of children who do not have some of these basic prerequisites for successful learning in the classroom.

The concept of 'aptitude' can therefore not easily be divorced from children's background and, in foreign language learning as in all other school subjects, success often also seems to depend on the home and on the extent of parental encouragement they receive. Many pupils in European Schools and other bilingual schools come from socially advantaged backgrounds. These more privileged children tend to have richer linguistic, social and cultural experiences

than many children from less advantaged backgrounds. Whether in the form of the number of books in the home or in the form of holidays abroad, research suggests that achievement at school is at least partially affected by such factors.

#### **4.7 Conclusion**

Learning success and outcomes are likely to be the result of a complex interplay between a host of factors, psychological, cognitive, affective, social, pedagogical as well as the status of the language learned and its relevance, real or perceived. Discussions in this chapter suggest that children of the same chronological age can vary greatly in the degree of language awareness they have attained, in their command of first language literacy skills, in their application of learning strategies, their previous experiences, their motivation, attentiveness and attitude towards the learning process as well as the language itself, its speakers and its culture.

It would not seem unreasonable to suggest that those children who know how to listen, who can pay attention and concentrate, who have a good command of reading and writing skills, who have a degree of language awareness, who display positive attitudes towards the total learning experience are more likely to obtain from their lessons the quality and quantity of language input necessary for successful learning and are thus more likely to make effective use of limited teaching and learning time.

This would challenge the assumption that younger is necessarily better for all children, in all contexts and under all circumstances. It has been argued that many of the above 'qualities' are lacking in young children and are more likely to be present in more mature children. Language awareness increases with age, conceptual and world knowledge increase with age, learning and communication strategies increase with age. However, the effects of the environment and supportive backgrounds in developing these competences cannot be ignored thus rendering the very concept of 'age' and its companion of 'optimum age' derived from first language acquisition a rather unreliable predictor of success in learning a foreign language and categorical statements such as 'younger is better' or 'older is better' might have little relevance when made in the context of the classroom.

Younger might be no worse for gaining a first 'taste' of a foreign language. The task of going beyond this first taste, however, requires qualities in the learner which many young children do not yet have. A clear distinction would need to be made between cognitive and affective variables in learning a foreign language and while 'younger' might be 'better' for the latter the evidence suggests that younger is not necessarily better for the former. In any case, affective factors alone, although an important ingredient in the total learning process, are not very reliable predictors of likely learning outcomes. Chapters Five and Six will focus on two case studies of children learning French at primary school.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **Case Study One - School One**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

Chapter Five and Chapter Six focus on two case studies carried out in two primary schools in England where French is taught. Findings from classroom observations, interviews with children and questionnaires as well as the 'profiles' of individual children will be presented and discussed. It is hoped that close observation of what individual children are like in the foreign language classroom, their views on learning French and their concerns will, if not determine, at least inform further policy and practice, starting from where children are likely to be rather than from where it is often thought that they should be. Any account is necessarily a simplification of complex classroom processes and a small-scale study such as this one cannot match projects on a national scale and the conclusions from these projects. However, this does not mean that the case studies will remain at the level of descriptions and a number of tentative conclusions will be drawn. It is hoped that the response to and interpretation of the data will allow readers to judge the implications for themselves and for their own specific contexts.

#### **5.2 Method**

In order to 'explore and understand better' (Block, 1996: 74) how children respond to learning a foreign language, in this case French, at primary school and to provide some insights into their experiences and perceptions of the learning process, it was decided that a case study would be the appropriate way

forward rather than an approach based on a 'scientific paradigm'. Cohen and Manion (1995: 123) list some of the advantages of case studies. They are said to be strong in reality and down to earth, they recognise the complexity of educational processes and they provide data which allow for further interpretation or for the pursuit of different purposes. The insights gained from case studies are deemed to be more accessible and able to serve multiple audiences.

There is currently no standardised pattern of provision for foreign languages at key stage 2, for example in the form of a National Curriculum, and consequently no standardised form of teacher education and training. Each and every primary school is free to offer a foreign language to its children in any form it sees fit. It is up to individual schools to decide who should teach what, when and how and, as a consequence, aims, syllabuses, methods and materials are not commonly shared amongst schools and teachers. Inevitably, each and every primary school represents a unique teaching and learning environment with a number of variables at play. Given this complexity of the educational contexts, creating a theoretical framework that could be 'tested by experimentation, replication and refinement' (Cohen & Manion 1995: 106) was deemed *neither feasible nor desirable*. Barrow queries how in an educational context 'unique events' could possibly be controlled and replicated:



"...if only one or two possibly important factors are not taken into account, it makes drawing firm conclusions quite unwarranted...It is therefore not possible to state simply whether this problem is contingent or necessary. Certainly some variables that are not controlled in any given piece of research might in principle have been; others, such as the unique combination of this particular child with this particular teacher, interacting in this particular way, at this time in this context, cannot be, as a matter of logic. (The uniqueness of the combination may be the explanation of what happens on this occasion, and, if it is unique, it cannot be generalised from.)." (Barrow, 1984: 154)

Questioning therefore whether 'tightly controlled scientific research can explain complex social phenomena' (Van Lier, 1988: 53), it was decided that an ethnographic approach would be the most appropriate way to investigate real life phenomena in real life contexts and to arrive at a modest understanding of the many subtle and complex processes in the primary school foreign language classroom.

Chapter Four centred around theoretical discussions of a wide range of substrates considered important in learning a foreign language at primary school such as the ability to listen to formal instruction, noticing, attention spans, a degree of consciousness and language awareness, literacy skills, world knowledge, memory, learning strategies, the ability to stay on task, aptitude and children's home background, social skills as well as affective variables. Every attempt was to be made in the case studies to present as holistic a picture as possible of classroom life. However, given the complexity

of circumstances under which schools are operating and the large number of variables involved, no formal 'measurements' were feasible and those factors discussed in Chapter Four which would have required 'tightly controlled scientific research', such as aptitude, memory, children's conceptual levels or literacy levels in their first language, could not be pursued. This is by no means to suggest that factors such as aptitude, memory, conceptual or literacy levels are deemed to be of less importance than others. Only those aspects of the theoretical discussion which were deemed observable, analysable and interpretable without having been formally measured or assessed, such as enthusiasm and attitudes, attention spans, self-concept, children's social skills, their likes and dislikes and views of the French language itself, for example, were investigated in the case studies. A detailed examination of other variables, such as teacher personality, for example, were not within the scope of this study. Clark & Trafford make the point that a teacher's relationship with pupils, teacher personality rather than gender, affect attitudes towards the subject and, by implication, learning outcomes. As one girl in their study put it:

"You take more in, because they make it more, a lot more fun to be there you know, you'd rather be there than you would say a different lesson, because it depends on the teacher and what the teacher's like really, and how well you get on with them." (Clark & Trafford, 1996: 44)

As far as this could be evaluated on the basis of one weekly lesson observation, albeit in School Two over a period of two years, both teachers in both schools seemed to have very positive relationships with their pupils.

### 5.2.1 Collection of Data

It was decided that data should be collected through lesson observations, interviews and questionnaires. The possibility of children keeping diaries was considered but rejected as the case studies were to focus on young children some of whom might have weak literacy skills.

Simply reporting classroom events and the way in which children respond or behave does not necessarily provide much insight into what they might think and feel. As Hammersley & Atkinson (1991) state, direct observation of an action cannot fully explain the complex mechanisms behind it and it becomes necessary to engage in communication with the observed to gain a better understanding of their actions (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Edge & Richards emphasise the importance of 'voice' in educational research:

"The *voice* of the research population must somehow be heard, and it might well be that the depth of an individual interpretation of an individual's voice will be as much valued as breadth of widely gathered opinion."  
(Edge & Richards, 1998: 348)

The concept of 'voice' is also emphasised by Sinclair-Taylor & Costley who stress the importance of asking primary school children about the nature of their learning experiences in determining curriculum policy:

"Only the children themselves can speak about their experiences and perceptions of the social and pedagogic aspects of schooling. Planning educational provision responsively and effectively requires that we tap into pupils' views." (Sinclair-Taylor & Costley, 1995: 20)

It was therefore decided that findings from classroom observations should be supplemented by interviews and questionnaires to account for those factors which might not be readily observable.

### **5.2.2 Choice of Schools**

The evaluation of the Scottish National Pilot was based on two case studies which 'had a lot in common with other projects and schools and only showed a few characteristics that made them substantially different' (Low et al., 1995). In choosing schools for the purpose of this study a number of considerations were taken into account. It was important that class sizes should be close to the national average, that there should be school and teacher co-operation and the opportunity for long-term classroom observation. Equally important, however, were the context-specific variables defining a school. To avoid 'sample bias' the two schools chosen for this study are representative of two distinctly different learning environments each drawing their intake from a very different socio-economic and linguistic background. These schools were chosen to investigate what might be common and recurrent themes across contexts as well as to identify those factors that might be unique to a specific context and individual children. No special groups were created for the purpose of this study and the children in School One were aged eight to nine and the children in School Two were aged ten to eleven. Both schools will be described in more detail, School One in the following pages, School Two at the start of Chapter Six.

### **5.2.3 Preliminary Field Work and Access to Schools**

As prescriptive rules are not always very useful in gaining access to case study schools (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1991), telephone calls were made, followed by visits to schools where the purpose of the study and the proposed method of data collection were discussed and agreement obtained. Both schools were very open, keen to take part in the study and hoping to benefit from the experience. It was agreed between all partners that confidentiality would be respected. No schools or teachers will therefore be explicitly named and children will only be referred to by their first names.

### **5.3 Lesson Observations**

Participant observation, mixed with various degrees of involvement in the activities of the classroom and sometimes working alongside individual children, seemed the most natural way to proceed in the primary classroom. During largely teacher directed lessons it is difficult to know what goes on in children's minds. Working closely alongside children over a number of lessons, however, would provide an opportunity to obtain data which otherwise might be difficult to collect. Working with children on an individual basis would allow for a more detailed gathering of information on both verbal and non-verbal responses from children and enable the researcher to check what individual children had understood, for example. Ephemeral or unpredictable responses, responses such as ducking to avoid the teacher's question, asking a peer or the researcher about an adequate response would be more problematic to record if the class as a whole would be observed at all times. Participant observation

was therefore deemed preferable despite reservations expressed by some researchers:

"The accounts that typically emerge from participant observations are often described as subjective, biased, impressionistic, idiosyncratic and lacking in the precise quantifiable measures that are the hallmark of survey research and experimentation." (Cohen & Manion, 1995: 110)

Van Lier makes the salient point that what cannot be counted or formally measured is not necessarily of less importance:

"The category-coding tradition is inescapably locked into a circularity, due to the selection of categories that are deemed relevant. The criteria for their selection must come from some theory or ideology, as mentioned before. They must also be held to be clear and unambiguous, directly observable and countable, and this inevitably excludes from the sphere of operations some of the most interesting features of classroom interaction...Finally, when the time for counting arises, it is unquestioningly assumed that more (of whatever it is that is called relevant) is necessarily better." (Van Lier, 1988: 43)

It was decided that within the context of the primary school classroom 'subjective impressions of a complete experience may be more valuable than objective measurement of a small and unimportant part' (Brumfit & Mitchell, 1990: 13).

Chaudron (1988: 180) discusses a number of classroom interaction studies and stresses the importance of 'baseline units of observations' in such studies.

However, the case studies presented here were explorative. Systematic

observation, ticking off events at regular intervals and according to a set list of categories, was not deemed appropriate as it was thought that such an approach would do less than justice in capturing the 'totality' of the primary school classroom situation. Lesson observations were to be naturalistic and the observer did not start with any specific preconceived notions as to the variables to be studied or with 'a hypothesis to test' (Long, 1980: 21). No specific schedule such as discussed in Long (1980), Mitchell, Parkinson & Johnstone (1981), Mitchell (1985) or Chaudron (1988) were to be used and to begin with it was assumed that everything might be relevant for later analysis.

Although informal observation does not 'in various respects satisfy the canons of scientific demonstration' a holistic approach was chosen as it enabled the researcher to look at a set of complex interactions and allowed for the recognition of features that formal instruments might not detect as they could not have been anticipated during the design stage (Barrow, 1984: 244).

Highly structured observation, which might have yielded more quantifiable data, inevitably would have led to non-participation and would not have allowed the observer to form relationships with the children. Forming relationships with the children was deemed to be crucial if they were to behave 'in their normal way'.

Hammersley & Atkinson (1991) state that researchers and methodologies inevitably affect the setting, the participants, the data and the interpretation of the data. Lesson observations were to follow the normal pattern of procedures as much as this was possible and no attempt was to be made to interfere or

influence in any way instructions and interactions although in some cases suggestions as to methods or materials were made to the teachers during or after a lesson. In the event, participation put children and teachers very much at ease and teachers in both schools saw the observer's presence as a bonus rather than as an intrusion. As far as the children were concerned, to them the observer was just 'another adult' in the classroom.

### **5.3.1 Recording of Information from Lesson Observations**

Notes from lesson observations were to provide insights into classroom procedures while also providing the context within which questionnaires and interviews should be interpreted. Recording took place in the form of written notes either during lessons if this could be done in an unobtrusive way or immediately after lessons. Although an attempt was made to describe lessons in the greatest possible detail, the thoroughness of the notes and the amount gathered inevitably varied from lesson to lesson depending on the degree of involvement in the activities of the classroom. Descriptions are of necessity incomplete and total objectivity cannot be claimed. On the other hand, descriptions and interpretations do include some events that were 'felt' such as 'sensation of impatience, urgency, relaxation, frustration, and so on' (Van Lier, 1988: 80).

The researcher decided against video or tape recordings of lessons for a number of reasons. First, these were seen as putting undue pressures on teachers who had volunteered to teach French and who were not necessarily



'subject specialists'. Second, both video recordings and tape recordings were seen as a potential influence on normal classroom procedures and behaviour of both children and teacher. Nevertheless, in School Two one of the early lessons which would take place in a similar format with every teaching group was video-recorded. This video-recording (with the consent of the teacher involved) could provide the reader with some insight into the complexities of the multi-ethnic and multi-lingual primary school classroom.

### **5.3.2 Analysis of Data from Lesson Observations**

If classroom research is to have meaning and purpose, some form of categorisation and grouping of findings is necessary. Long (1980: 21) stated that in ethnographic research 'the structuring is done by the researcher and not by the data gathering device chosen prior to beginning the observation'.

While every effort was made to present as holistic a picture as possible of classroom life, the categories used for analysing the data collected from lesson observations were underpinned by only those aspects of the theoretical discussions in Chapter Four which were deemed observable, analysable and interpretable without having necessarily been formally measured or assessed such as enthusiasm, attention spans, learning strategies, written language and social learning. Observations on children's French and feedback on their performance were also included, however, these were not formally measured, as important variables such as quality and quantity of language input and patterns of interaction, for example, could not be controlled. Therefore no claim

is made as to cause and effect relationships. Some ephemeral findings which also seemed important but which are less open to 'categorisation' or grouping, such as instances of children displaying 'world knowledge' or lack of such knowledge, will also be discussed.

#### **5.4 Interviews**

As lesson observations only provide a partial picture of the complex teaching and learning process, it was decided that interviews should be carried out to complement participant classroom observation in School One, Case Study One. Their purpose was to gain a more thorough, if modest, understanding of children's experiences of learning French. In particular, the affective issues discussed in Chapter Four which could not be fully explored via lesson observation alone were the main focus of these individual interviews. They were to explore, for example, if enthusiasm is widespread amongst children and if the number of hands up in the classroom is really an indicator of levels of enthusiasm. They were to explore whether children generally feel at ease in their French lessons and whether those natural characteristics which have traditionally been ascribed to them such as spontaneity and willingness to have a go would also apply to the foreign language classroom. Interviews were also meant to provide information on children's perception of the various skills, what individual children might find easy or difficult, the things they liked and disliked about learning French, their view of the French language itself and parental support.

Ellis (1996) points to the difficulties in interviewing individual learners who might simply say what they think the researcher wants to hear. However, this was deemed a minor 'disadvantage' in comparison to what was to be gained. Slightly more problematic might have been Ellis' second point that interview techniques can 'reveal only those factors of which the learner is conscious' (Ellis, 1996: 101). Yet, it was felt that interviews would nevertheless provide valuable insights into children's perception of the learning process, although these might, at times, be incomplete.

#### **5.4.1 Question Formation**

Semi-structured interviews which would provide children with a frame for responses were deemed to be the best way forward. As suggested by Cohen & Manion (1994: 93), to begin with subsidiary topics for the interviews were identified. In order to avoid any bias, a question format was then chosen which would be as open-ended as possible, unlikely to provide any clues as to potential responses and a basic set of questions was selected. These were to allow children to express their own viewpoint, to tell what they really wanted to tell and what mattered to them in their early foreign language learning experience, such as the things they liked or disliked about learning French, what they thought they found easy or difficult and how they generally felt about learning French. Individual questions were trialled whilst working alongside children during lessons. A copy of the interview questions can be found in Appendix B. How interviews were conducted, transcribed and analysed will be discussed further after the analysis of findings from lesson observations.

## **5.5 Questionnaires**

It was decided that a questionnaire should be administered to the slightly older children in School Two, as they were deemed to be capable of handling an appropriately designed questionnaire. Additionally, interviewing a large number of children was thought to place too big a demand on limited teaching time and too disruptive to the timetable. The purpose of this questionnaire, like the purpose of the interview, was to lead to a more in-depth understanding of children's experiences of learning French, their thoughts and their beliefs.

### **5.5.1 Question Formation**

Subsidiary topics for a questionnaire were identified and specific information requirements itemised as suggested by Cohen & Manion (1994: 93). As with interviews, the topics for the questionnaire derived from the theoretical discussions in Chapter Four, in particular the affective issues which could not be fully explored through lesson observation. Unlike the content for the interviews, however, the content for the questionnaire was also partially informed by questions administered to the children in the Pilot Scheme by Burstall and her colleagues (Burstall et al., 1974: 249-253). Questions on the questionnaire were to capture, as far as this was possible, the totality of children's experiences in their French lessons, in particular their affective responses to the learning process. The questionnaire was to provide insights into children's perception of the four skills, for example, what they might find easy or difficult in learning French, what they liked and disliked and their view of the French language itself. Questions which would give some indication of

children's interests and what they would want to learn (and which would also provide the teacher with an indication of possible topics of interest to cover in future lessons) were also included.

Thoughts were then given to the precise structure of the questionnaire and the framing of questions based on guidance provided by Selltiz, Wrightsman & Cook (1976, cited in Cohen & Manion, 1994: 95) with reference to question content, question wording, form of response and sequencing of questions. Open-ended and structured questionnaires were piloted in School Two. While these provided useful insights, they were not found to be ideal. It was found that whilst children needed a degree of guidance, it was also necessary to allow for a high degree of freedom for children's answers in order to capture the subtlety and variety of their responses. Consequently a hybrid semi-structured approach was developed. This proved to be a more appropriate questionnaire format and was used without further modification for Case Study Two. This questionnaire included a mix of question types ranging from alternative sentence completion, to ticking, to more open-ended questions. Some questions were in the form of half statements for children to complete. These were partially based on Block's idea of a 'gravitation activity' (Block, 1997: 355) but without the potentially embarrassing 'public' aspect of other learners giving physical support to a statement. With some questions children were asked to give reasons for their answers. This was to help them clarify their thinking and to make responses both more informative and more reliable than a simple 'I like'

or 'I do not like' statement would have done. A copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix E.

Much has been said about young children's enthusiasm for learning a foreign language. The writer's own experience of working with a number of very different schools prior to this study suggested that 'enthusiasm' might not always be a reflection of age. It was therefore decided that a very short 'questionnaire' (in the form of a couple of questions only) on learning French should be administered to a year seven group at a secondary comprehensive school. The questions and children's responses to them will be reported in Chapter Six in the context of discussions of findings from the two primary schools.

## **5.6 Presentation and Discussion of Findings**

In the interest of clarity and to do full justice to the clearly different contexts in which the two schools are operating the writer has decided in favour of two separate chapters for the two case studies. The remainder of this chapter will therefore focus on School One. Lesson observations from this school will be presented as will findings from interviews with individual children. The chapter will finish with a theoretical discussion of findings and a summary of these.

The findings from School Two, lesson observations, responses to questionnaires and profiles of individual children will then be presented and discussed in Chapter Six before some tentative conclusions will be drawn based on the findings from both schools.

## **5.7 School One - Background**

### **5.7.1 Social and Demographic Factors**

School One is a state co-educational combined first and middle school located in a more affluent part of an outer London Borough. The school draws its intake predominantly from a middle-class background. In 1996 there were around 330 pupils on roll, with only 15 children on free lunch tickets, that is to say from a family on income support. The school reflects a very positive ethos and a disciplined and organised working environment. Unauthorised absences amounted to only 0.01% during the school year 1996/7.

### **5.7.2 National Curriculum Assessment Results**

The school brochure suggests that results in English, Mathematics and Science at the end of key stage 2 tend to match or be above the national average. In 1997, national tests were sat by 87 pupils and Level 4 or above was gained in English by 83%, in Mathematics by 79% and in Science by 71% of the pupils (Guardian Education, 27 January, 1998).

### **5.7.3 Languages Present in School One**

The majority of the children in School One have English as their first language. Some children have an Asian language as their mother tongue. (Precise numbers for the year 1996 were not available.)

#### **5.7.4 Class Composition and the Teacher**

The class observed was a year 4 class, composed of 28 pupils, 11 girls and 17 boys aged eight to nine. The teacher was female and the children's class teacher. She was a primary school specialist and the co-ordinator for French throughout the school. Although not a language 'specialist' as such, she had been attending a number of inservice training courses provided by the borough.

#### **5.7.5 Patterns of Provision in French**

French teaching generally took place for one hour on one occasion per week but due to an integrated day approach and a flexible timetable, French was not always taught on the same day or at the same time. While it was emphasised by the writer that the natural flow of things should not be disrupted, in order to accommodate the study it was agreed that French would be taught for approximately an hour on a fixed day each week at the end of the morning session to allow for classroom observations to take place on a regular basis. The school was visited in the third term after the Easter holidays when children had already learned French for two terms. Lesson observations thus started in April 1996 and finished at the end of the summer term. Lesson observation notes can be found in Appendix A.

#### **5.7.6 Learning Context**

Although the children were the focus of this study, rather than precise linguistic outcomes, language input, tasks and activities and interactions between teacher and pupil or between pupils, it was nevertheless deemed important to provide



the reader with a contextual framework for lesson observations and a brief summary of the content covered during the lessons. The writer is, however, fully aware that the following descriptions are rather 'general'.

The content for the term's work in French focused on basic number work, telling one's name and age, likes and dislikes expressed as 'j'aime...' and 'je n'aime pas...' in the context of sporting activities and the ordering of items of drink in a restaurant. Most lessons followed a similar pattern. The teacher would present a model utterance supported by flashcards which the children would repeat as a whole class and then on an individual basis. This would be followed by question and answer work, for example in the form of: 'Qu'est-ce que tu aimes?', 'J'aime...'. Pupils would then listen to a tape and complete a worksheet or do a pairwork activity. Occasionally they would draw or colour in a sheet. Focus was largely on the spoken word with very little reading and writing. Reading was limited to single words and phrases on worksheets and writing was mainly restricted to copywriting from the chalkboard. In most lessons there was time for some sort of game or 'playful activity'. There was no explicit teaching of the formal aspects of language.

#### **5.7.7 Teacher Use of English**

The teacher used English in explanations to ensure that everybody knew what they were expected to do and she used English to praise and reprimand. She used English to encourage pupils to think about language as a system as well as the learning process as such. She invited pupils to 'have a guess' and to

predict what might come next on a tape, for example. She made references to English cognates, such as 'complete' for example, to guide children towards understanding of French 'complète'. The teacher also made use of English to develop children's general knowledge, on one occasion for example she talked about the Olympic Games and explained the significance of the five Olympic rings.

## **5.8 Observed Outcomes - School One**

### **5.8.1 Children's French**

It is important to state at the start of this section that the target language children produced was only one of many observations. A small case study cannot hope to match large-scale national studies such as the Pilot Scheme or the Scottish National Pilot and the difficulty of evaluating learning outcomes and establishing exactly what a learner knows or does not know at a given stage in his second language development has already been mentioned in Chapter Three.

The following paragraphs therefore can make no claim to children's precise linguistic development nor can any claims be made as to cause and effect relationships. Findings are simply meant to provide some insights into what seemed to be recurring patterns or problem areas in children's language comprehension and production. Expressions such as 'some', 'few' or 'the majority' will be used as precise numbers were not the main concern of this study and no formal tests were undertaken.

Due to the wide range of context-specific variables and complexities of the learning situations already discussed at the start of the chapter, the writer decided to comment only on language material which would have been heard, practised and produced frequently over a period of time such as numbers, telling and asking somebody's name or age and likes and dislikes.

Observations thus suggested that in the area of numbers some children had considerable difficulties counting up to 10 or 20 in French. Even after extensive practice some were unable to either recognise or recall basic numbers.

Although these children could 'count' in joint class choruses, many were at a loss when asked to do so on an individual basis. Some children who apparently could count and seemed to have mastered the numbers taught could not recognise or recall numbers if these were not sequential. Whether these children simply did not remember numbers was difficult to establish and the possibility that those who experienced problems with French numbers also experienced difficulties with number concepts in their first language cannot be discounted.

Remembering genders, especially, seemed to cause problems for many children despite extensive practice of vocabulary items. 'Le natation', for example, was frequently produced instead of the correct 'la natation' even after several weeks of practice. Hawkins (1981: 86, 87) makes the salient point that 'French offers most possibility of analogical error in the memorising of gender'

and that 'the difficulty of recognising and recalling gender for the learner on a "drip-feed diet" in school arises from the paucity of gender clues given in the classroom context'. However, as was stated earlier in Chapter Three, the problems English-speaking children experience with learning the French gender system would seem to be a commonly reported beginners' problems. Learners of French of all ages seem to find gender concord difficult. Allen, Swain, Harley & Cummins discuss the development of proficiency in French in immersion contexts and state that:

"The highest proportion of error was observed in frequently used (i.e. unavoidable) grammatical features such as gender, articles and verbs."  
(Allen et al., 1990: 67)

The problems the children in the case study experienced with gender therefore do not provide evidence in support of any particular age being 'better' or 'worse' in this respect. However, problems with gender also give rise to a number of questions on feedback to error for example, whether, when, how and why, errors should be corrected and on methodology. Hawkins (1981) stated that most teachers would agree that uncertainty about gender in French is a major cause of loss of confidence and that children need all the help they can get. It would therefore seem important to re-emphasise the role of written language in supporting memory, in reinforcing learning and in encouraging progress.

Problems were also noticed in relation to question and answer work and the structural properties of language. In answer to the question 'Quel âge as-tu?',

for example, the answer 'J'ai neuf' (leaving out 'ans') was frequently heard even after several weeks of practice indicating possibly interference from English, possibly a lack of concern for the structural properties of language. Children seemed to experience particular problems with questions and answers both in understanding and formation. Frequently heard and practised questions such as 'Quel âge as-tu?' and 'Comment t'appelles-tu?' were still not understood by some children when addressed directly by the teacher or researcher. This seems to indicate that on previous occasions they had simply repeated what somebody else had said or responded to stimuli without necessarily understanding the content of the message.

Especially when asked a series of questions or when questions were mixed, answers to the one were frequently given in response to the other. A question such as 'où habites-tu?', for example, would then be answered with 'j'ai huit...'. Children also tended to repeat part of a question in their answers. In response to the question 'Comment t'appelles-tu?' constructions such as 'Comment je m'appelle...' were not uncommon. Myles, Hooper & Mitchell (1998) reported that repeating part of a sentence was also common amongst learners of French at secondary school; such utterances are therefore not limited to beginners of a young age. It was stated in Chapter Three that 'gains made in grammatical understanding and sentence manipulation are often accompanied by some loss of accuracy in surface details of pupils' speech' (Mitchell & Dickson, 1997: 2).

It might therefore be more appropriate to talk about stages in children's foreign language development rather than about learning outcomes in French as such. The data collected does not allow the writer to judge if, when, how and why some children might have progressed from these 'mixed' chunks of language.

What could be observed, however, was the inability of some children to memorise patterns or chunks of language, to recall and use these even in contexts where it would have been appropriate to do so. As was discussed earlier, not seeing language written down might have prevented these children from making much progress.

During pairwork, when asked to practise questions and answers, children generally did not use longer, structured utterances but one or two vocabulary items only. When longer utterances were expressed these tended to be pre-fabricated patterns which showed no creative reconstruction or adaptation to the context. Thus some children simply repeated the items of information given by another child without adjusting this information, such as age or where they lived, to their own circumstances. Only very few children made any attempt at manipulating language items. Findings from Scotland reported in Chapter Three had already suggested that children tended to limit their utterances to single items of vocabulary or prefabricated chunks of language and did not attempt to manipulate language in any meaningful way. However, it would seem that the use of single items of vocabulary also occurs amongst adult acquirers of French in natural contexts. In the European Science

Foundation project on adult second language acquisition, for example, one of the subjects, Zahra acquiring French in France, is reported as 'starting out with only isolated words in the target language' (Perdue, 1993: 207). Another adult immigrant into France, Abdelmalek, also produced only one-word utterances at the start of the project (Perdue, 1993: 189). Both adults, however, are reported as making progress in their use of French.

Despite a 'near-native' model, pronunciation was often incorrect and did not resemble the model given. The silent 't' in 'sport' was frequently pronounced, for example, possibly indicating interference from English. There was considerable confusion between 'Je' and 'J'ai' resulting in something like 'Chei' and some children became quite 'apt' at hiding behind sloppy pronunciation. However, confusion between these different forms is not limited to learners of a young age. Myles, Hooper & Mitchell refer to studies by Harley (1992) who noted:

"...the frequent use by immersion students of French of nonsegmented *j'ai* as an equivalent of the first person pronoun *je* in English, and argued that their failure to grasp the dual status of *j'ai* as pronoun and auxiliary (*je* = I, *ai* = have) was bound to delay their entry into the French verb system."  
(Myles et al., 1998: 333, emphasis in original)

Le/la or un/une were also often pronounced with little clarity, again possibly indicating a lack of concern for accuracy (and possibly understanding) on the part of the learner. It was already stated in Chapter Three that many of these problems are shared with older beginners. Methodological considerations are

not the concern of this chapter but the importance of being able to read and write and the role of the written language in pointing out and consolidating these differences was already highlighted in Chapter Four.

### **5.8.2 Feedback on Performance**

Feedback on performance, either on pronunciation or structural accuracy, did not often happen, possibly in the interest of maintaining positive attitudes and motivation. However, the importance of corrective feedback has been emphasised by Bley-Vroman (1989), Lightbown & Spada (1990) and Schachter (1990) for example. Bley-Vroman argues that the 'unclear findings of empirical studies on the efficacy of correction does not mean that correction plays no role, as some of the errors learners make suggest that they have formed 'a hypothesis which requires negative evidence for disconfirmation' (Bley-Vroman, 1989: 48,49) and Schachter claims that feedback is needed to give learners information on the clarity, accuracy and comprehensibility of their utterances. Negative evidence, although not always necessary, is therefore often useful.

Findings from child development studies, discussed in Chapter Four, suggested that young children find it difficult to see anything 'wrong' with incorrect language and a number of authors in Tunmer, Pratt & Herriman (1984) suggested that young children frequently judge statements in their first language on their semantic rather than on their structural accuracy. On a number of occasions when the teacher or researcher would point out an error, some children found it difficult to notice or recognise an error or to remember



feedback and corrections. During writing activities, for example, several had problems identifying letters they had missed out or even complete words. If the error had been in speaking, children repeated the teachers correct version but later on in the lesson the correct answer would be forgotten again by some. Given the choice between a correct and an incorrect utterance some children accepted the incorrect version although they had heard and repeated the correct version again and again over time. However, these observations would seem to emphasise the importance of 'consistent and unambiguous feedback' (Allen et al., 1990: 67) and suggest that repetition alone can be insufficient.

### **5.8.3 Enthusiasm**

Enthusiasm and enjoyment are concepts that are difficult to measure formally. Nevertheless, if the number of hands going up in response to a teacher's question and the number of children volunteering for a given task is at least an indicator of how children in this school responded to the experience of learning French, then enthusiasm seemed to be present amongst most of them most of the time. However, since some responses quite clearly showed that some children had little idea of the correct answer to a question, one cannot exclude the possibility that some hands went up because 'everybody else put theirs up' or because children simply wanted to please the teacher.

*Most children in School One seemed very much at ease with the learning process. They appeared confident, they were keen and happy to have a go. Nevertheless there were exceptions. Some children, possibly as a reflection of*

their individual personality, were rather reserved and chose not to get involved most of the time. These children did not seem 'naturally spontaneous and willing to have a go'. Affective issues will be raised again in the context of the interviews with individual children.

#### **5.8.4 Attention Spans**

As has been argued in Chapter Four, being able to pay attention to formal instruction is important in the classroom. Allwright & Bailey (1991: 170) comment on both the importance and difficulty of measuring attention spans validly and reliably. Van Lier (1988: 93) suggests that while participation presupposes attention, attention in itself does not always have overt participation as a consequence. Since engagement might be only partially observable, simple observation might not be sufficient in evaluating attention levels and spans. Focusing and attending to input has to come from within the learner but how does one know what exactly the learner focuses on at any particular time? Experience has shown, for example, that some children can be very apt at pretending that they are observant and attentive when in reality they are daydreaming.

Despite these difficulties in evaluating levels of attention through observation, as far as could be judged by their responses to the teacher's questions in terms of hands raised, for example, or by the amount of 'off-task talk', the children in School One seemed generally attentive throughout most parts of the lessons. However, being attentive and remembering things and getting things 'right' quite

clearly proved to be very different issues and despite much 'attentiveness' and enthusiasm amongst children the available input was not always converted into intake and what might have been 'taken in' was frequently forgotten.

Establishing the precise reasons why this should have been the case with individual children, however, is not within the scope of this thesis.

### **5.8.5 Learning Strategies**

The 'good language learner' is allegedly a 'willing guesser' (Rubin, 1975, Naiman et al., 1978). Lesson observations showed that while many children were quite willing to guess and to have a go, they also tended to guess 'wildly'. On a number of occasions children offered the name of a place in answer to a question on time or a time in answer to a question on place and numbers were frequently given instead of places or names. Such 'wild' guesses also accidentally increased the number of instances of incorrect language input the class experienced. It also became apparent during observations that some children employed 'avoidance strategies', that they ducked out of the teacher's attention when the class was asked a question, chose not to respond or responded non-verbally. Subsequent conversations with children revealed that some did not respond although they knew the answer to a question.

A surprising number of children also thought that they 'knew' when they quite clearly did not. A chorus response to the teacher's question would often be in the affirmative when a follow up question by the researcher revealed that some

had clearly not understood whether it was a language item in French or an instruction in English. A number of children did not know how to tick a box or how to complete the most simple worksheets although they claimed that they did. 'Unawareness' of what is involved in the learning process is likely to prevent children from asking for help when they are clearly in need of it. Discussions in Chapter Four suggested that older children tend to be more 'aware' of the demands of the learning process or a specific task. Observations would seem to indicate that some of the most basic skills and strategies required in dealing successfully with a foreign language in the classroom cannot be taken for granted with young children and would need to be explicitly taught.

#### **5.8.6 Writing**

Only on few occasions was whole class writing attempted. On these occasions some children managed to copy a few lines of the chalkboard and apparently enjoyed the experience. Others struggled and some did not even get started and found the whole experience frustrating. On one occasion it took some children in the class roughly five minutes to copy the day's date in French from the chalkboard while others finished in no time. On a number of occasions when individual children were observed at work, some paid no attention to the separation of individual words or to the end of lines in their exercise books. These children had little idea of what it was they were copying, once they got to the end of a line they simply started a new one, even in the middle of a word. Copying without mistakes also presented problems for a considerable number of children. How a foreign language, especially one with a close

grapheme/phoneme match, can contribute to developing children's literacy skills deserves serious consideration in any early scheme.

#### **5.8.7 Social Learning**

Each classroom represents a unique social group with its own specific procedures, rules and regulations. The children in School One generally seemed very mature in their approach to classroom learning. The need for reprimand was next to non-existent and children quite happily worked in whole class situations, in groups, as pairs or on an individual basis. According to the teacher, responsible classroom behaviour in School One was not a 'spin-off' from learning French. Due to the general working ethos of the school such behaviour had already been in place before the children started to learn a foreign language. As will be seen in Chapter Six, this was not the case in School Two.

The following pages will focus on the interviews carried out with children in School One. The conduct of these interviews, recording and transcription as well as findings from interviews will be discussed.

#### **5.9 Conduct of Interviews with Children**

Although children had been told that they were going to be asked about their experience of learning French, they did not know beforehand what to expect exactly and could therefore not practise and rehearse possible answers.

As the children were only eight years old it was decided that they should be allowed to say what they wanted to say as much as this was logistically possible. Children should be allowed to speak freely and the interviewer would only interfere when this became necessary, for example to clarify a point or to move on to the next question when children had exhausted what they wanted to say. The interviewer should also respond in a positive way to anything the children said beyond the immediate concern of a question so as to encourage them to be as 'natural' as possible. In the event, interviewing 8-year old children did not prove to be an easy matter. It became clear that what might have been a straightforward question for one child had to be rephrased for another and while some children could just 'talk' without much prompting others found it difficult to talk 'ad hoc'. The interviewer tried to adjust to individual children's responses as much as this was possible and the precise nature and the order of questions during the interviews consequently had to be flexible. Although every attempt was made to adjust to individual children's responses, the possibility that some 'follow-up' questions might have slightly confused some children some of the time cannot be totally excluded.

Interviews were conducted in the school library with one child at a time. Different possibilities, such as paired interviews or group interviews had been contemplated but it was decided that individual interviews would be the best way forward as children were less likely to be influenced by the views of their peers. Any potential problems the 'more shy' children might experience were largely avoided by the class teacher sending the more confident children first.

On the appointed day 28 children were present and, although they were given the option of not taking part in the interviews, all 28 wanted to do so. All the children without exception seemed very much at ease although some were obviously less expressive than others. The length of the interviews varied depending on what the children had to say although most were kept to a maximum of about 15 minutes.

#### **5.9.1 Recording of Interviews**

Interviews were tape-recorded as it was felt that notetaking would inhibit some of the children and that the interviewer would not be able to give the non-verbal encouraging feedback that seems crucial in interviews with young children, such as eye contact, for example.

#### **5.9.2 Transcripts of Interviews**

All interviews were transcribed and transcripts can be found in Appendix C.

Natural spoken language contains many features such as pauses and hesitations, false starts as well as paralinguistic features such as laughter or nodding. These are essential in studies which focus on precise linguistic performance, for example. For the purpose of this study, however, transcripts focus only on the general content of the message rather than on the precise language used by the children. The location of the interview room occasionally caused a degree of disruption but not to an extent where the general content of children's contributions could not be made out. In the transcripts 'xx' stands for those occasions where a word or several words could not be exactly identified.

### **5.9.3 Analysis of Data from Interviews**

As a result of the open-ended nature of the interviews, children answered freely and provided a wealth of information beyond the immediate concerns of individual questions. Some children, expectedly, did not say much during the interviews or what they said did not in any significant way add to what was said by the majority while others talked much about things that were not directly relevant to the task at hand. Some responded extensively to a question while others might have responded with a single word. Each interview did not follow the same sequence of questions or contain the same number of questions. The importance of individual differences amongst young children learning a foreign language in the primary school classroom had been emphasised in Chapter Four. It was decided that for the construction of individual children's profiles the salient points of each child's interview should be summarised. A number of points which individual children made and which were deemed important but less open to categorisation were only included in these profiles. By their very nature, responses to open-ended questions do not come in ready-made categories. Nevertheless, some form of grouping or structuring is necessary for analysis of the data. The content of a child's response or parts of it was not assigned to any special 'categories' but grouped under headings which were chosen in line with the discussions at the start of this Chapter: enthusiasm, self-concept, finding French 'easy', speaking in front of the class and willingness 'to have a go' and listening, reading and writing in French.



It became clear during the interview that some children had difficulties paying close attention to questions at the initial stage of the interview and that some, possibly through the nature of their out of school experiences, displayed a higher degree of language awareness than others. Two sections headed 'general listening skills' and 'awareness of language and the learning process' were therefore added. The subsequent pages will present a summary of each child's interview, a general discussion and analysis of the responses will then follow.

#### **5.10 Individual Children's Profiles**

##### **Sareet**

Sareet says French is her favourite subject. She thinks French is a different language because it has 'lots of apostrophes and things'. She would like to learn different languages and says she can count to three in Malai. She says she does not find anything about French difficult and likes reading, listening, speaking and writing. She likes being asked questions in class and she likes playing games. Sareet thinks she is doing well in French because before she could not get the 'days of the week in the right order' or the 'drinks'. When asked: 'Comment t'appelles-tu?' Sareet responded: 'Je m'appelle Sareet'.

##### **Donna**

Donna seems generally very confused about what she is supposed to do. (This 'confusion' had also been observed during lessons). During the interview she

starts by listing some words in French although she is asked to speak in English. She says she likes the 'le natation' and 'le ski'. She says she finds working with the tape confusing and difficult but she likes writing best.

(In lessons Donna was one of the weaker children who clearly experienced literacy problems.) Donna thinks she is doing well because she 'just feels comfortable'.

### **Stacey**

Stacey says she likes doing the 'sheets' and working in groups and role plays but thinks that listening to the tape is hard. She finds some things embarrassing, such as being put on the spot and is not too keen to speak in class. She also says that she keeps forgetting things but she thinks she is doing well in French and that French is 'alright'. When pushed she says that it is 'alright' (rather than good) because she 'does not know the hard bits sometimes' and she keeps 'forgetting words'. When asked: 'Comment t'appelles-tu?' Stacey replies: 'yeah'. When prompted: 'Je m'appelle...' Stacey says: 'Stacey'.

### **Vakeesan**

Vakeesan's first language is Tamil and he seems to experience problems with English. Vakeesan says he likes 'coca'. He also says he likes 'playing'. Asked about the French lessons he says that he likes reading and speaking but that he finds listening to the tape recorder difficult. He also says that he finds French more difficult than English. Nevertheless he says he likes French and

thinks that learning French is 'fun' but 'it is very difficult'. Vakeesan says 'me no understand French', 'nothing' and he says that he does not understand the teacher speaking in French. When asked if he could say something in French Vakeesan says: 'yeah, hello'. When asked 'Comment t'appelles-tu?' Vakeesan responds with silence. When prompted, he says that he does not understand and that he does not know what he is being asked.

### **Nicholas**

Nicholas says that he likes sports. When reminded that he was supposed to talk about French he says that he likes 'doing about numbers and different sports' and 'doing sheets'. He also says he likes listening to the tape, which he thinks is funny, 'especially the music on it', and he likes writing some things down. He says he likes reading if he 'can understand it' and he also likes playing games. Nicholas thinks he is doing well in French although at first 'it was a little bit hard'. Nicholas says 'as I got on in French I got more things right and enjoyed it more because then I don't have to go back and do it again'. Nicholas sounds positive about French but nevertheless appears somehow hesitant when asked if he likes learning French.

### **David**

David says he likes French because 'it's a challenge and a new task'. He likes experimenting with new words and trying to pronounce them. He also likes the 'activities' and 'acting things out'. He says he likes speaking French because 'it's quite exciting as it is a new language'. David thinks that if 'you're reading it

you're not showing everyone you know it but if you speak it you're showing everyone how good you are'. He thinks he is quite good at French because he is 'starting to understand 'practical terms' when the teacher asks a question or 'on top of sheets'. He thinks that French and English words are quite similar. He does not like reading and writing French because he finds it a 'bit boring' although he likes reading a bit better than writing because writing is quite hard. David would like to carry on learning French because 'it's good and he thinks that the family will be going on a skiing holiday to France and he would like to learn some more French so he 'can actually speak it'. When asked: 'Comment t'appelles tu?' David replies 'Mmh'. When prompted: 'Je m'appelle...', David says: 'David'.

### **Gary**

Gary says he finds French really easy although spelling worries him a little bit. Gary says he gets nervous sometimes when the teacher asks him a question and forgets what he needs to say. He likes role plays and acting and standing up in a group and speaking. He does not like having to write things down. Gary thinks he knows the 'easy' sports but not the 'hard' ones. He says that he was worried when he started to learn French but got more confident because his brother taught him and his mum also helped him.

### **Kunigoshi**

Kunigoshi says that he likes French but that he often forgets things. He says he likes speaking aloud in class and being asked questions. He likes reading best

because it's fun but he also says he finds it hard to pronounce new words. He says he finds the tape recorder easy but does not like writing because 'your hand gets tired'. He says he only puts his hand up when he is sure about the answer but does not mind so much if he makes a mistake. Kunigoshi says he likes French especially the 'drinks' and he is looking forward to next year.

### **Daniel**

Daniel starts the interview by saying that he likes rounders, playing his Nintendo and shot guns. He talks about playing a computer game called 'Doom' which, as far as the writer knows, is banned from sale to children in Germany. When reminded that he is supposed to talk about the French lessons Daniel says that he likes learning new words and colouring in and games but adds that he does not like 'tasting new foods'. (The tasting of foods did not happen in French lessons!). Daniel says he likes the tape recorder. He says he only puts his hand up if he is sure about an answer. He does not mind making mistakes but does not like being laughed at because 'it's embarrassing'. He says he likes working in groups or with a partner because sometimes 'I need a little help'. Daniel has a strong English accent when 'trying to speak French'.

### **Emily**

Emily says that she likes 'Take That' and the 'Spice Girls' and that her best friend is called Jamila. When Emily is reminded that she is meant to talk about learning French she says that she enjoys French and that learning it is fun. She says that she finds some parts easy, such as listening to the tape and some

difficult such as copying from the board. Emily says she only puts her hand up when she is sure about an answer but does not mind making a mistake. She thinks she is quite good at French but could be better as sometimes she forgets the words and finds pronouncing them difficult.

### **Karley**

Karley says she liked learning about all the different sports and drinks and that she likes playing games and doing number work. She also says she enjoyed learning new words, working with the tape recorder and group work. She has two French books at home and she says she always learns 'the new words'. She says she does not find French difficult, that it is easy and good fun. She does not mind making a mistake and just keeps trying.

### **Jamila**

Jamila does not seem too sure about learning French. She says she finds it a bit difficult, especially understanding the teacher. She thinks she gets easily confused and prefers it if the teacher speaks in English. She says she likes reading better than writing because it is easier and she likes playing games and learning new words.

### **Rebecca**

Rebecca wants to know why she has to talk about her experience learning French in the first place. She then says she likes animals. As far as learning French is concerned, she prefers speaking to reading or writing as she does not

know how to spell. She seems not too sure about learning French. She says she speaks Czech and sounds generally much more enthusiastic about this language as her friend also speaks it. Rebecca thinks that German is hard.

### **Mitul**

Mitul is very inconsistent and confused in his answers. One minute he likes something the next he is not too sure. He says he likes French because 'it's quite hard' and 'his dad says that one has to learn something hard'. He says he likes listening to the tape because it 'tests your hearing skills'. He thinks he is not very good at spelling and that things are hard to write but he also thinks writing things down is good fun. He does not 'mind' speaking aloud in class but he does not like it when the teacher 'tells him off'. He is not really sure whether French is fun. As he can say a couple of words in other languages, Mitul reckons he 'knows' 6 or 7 languages.

### **Graham**

Graham thinks he is quite good at learning French. He enjoys it, likes the subject and says he listens and practises a lot, sometimes with his brother. He also says he finds pronouncing new words hard and spelling them. He says he does not mind making mistakes because after all it is not like making a mistake in English when he 'should know'. French is something 'that I'm learning'.

Graham says he tries hard not to make a mistake but if he makes one he tries to correct it. He likes to be sure of an answer before he puts his hand up. He prefers working with a partner to working in groups because he likes working

with his friend. He says he is 'sometimes quite happy with the French' but sometimes not and would prefer it if the teacher spoke English because he does not know all the French words and sometimes does not understand what the teacher is saying.

### **Robert**

Robert sounds as if he is not too sure about learning French. He says he likes filling in worksheets and listening to the tape recorder. He says that he is worried when he does not understand what the teacher says because 'you don't know what's happening or something'. He is not too sure about speaking aloud in class and says that he does not really like it. Robert goes to Sunday school where he learns Hebrew. He says he finds this boring but the experience has given him an awareness of different alphabets and scripts and different relationships between sounds and symbols. When asked if he wants to continue learning French Robert is not too sure.

### **Natasha**

Natasha likes working in pairs and acting things out and doing role plays and most 'things to do with French'. She says she likes doing worksheets and work in her French book but she does not really like reading although she likes reading in English. She says she finds long words hard to pronounce but that she 'gets the hang of them after a while'. She does not like making mistakes and says that although the teacher 'asks us to put our hands up I'll only do it if I'm really sure and I know I won't get it wrong'. Natasha likes it when the



teacher speaks French because 'it's nice when people come round and they hear us speaking in French and different languages'. Natasha looks forward to learning more French.

### **Geoffrey**

Geoffrey says he likes learning French, especially speaking and does not mind when he makes a mistake. He likes worksheets, games and working in groups because in a group 'we can help each other'. Geoffrey also says, however, that he finds things difficult most of the time. He finds working with the tape recorder and understanding the teacher's questions especially difficult. He says he much prefers it when the teacher speaks English. Nevertheless Geoffrey says he definitely wants to continue with French.

### **Michael**

Michael sounds very confident and seems to remember what has been covered in the French lessons in more detail than the rest of the class. He uses some French during the interview although with a slight accent. Michael says he likes speaking in French and is not worried about making mistakes. He says he would like to get things right but if he does not he 'just gets on with it'. He likes learning about a different language and thinks it is fun and there does not seem to be anything he does not like. Michael says he goes to Jewish Sunday school and finds Hebrew quite hard 'because in Hebrew there's loads of feminine and masculine and that stuff'. He thinks Hebrew is harder than French. However, through his experience Michael has grasped some basic grammatical concepts.

Michael thinks he is doing really well in French because 'I'm enjoying it a lot and I'm learning a lot from it so I really just want to go to France and try and test some of it out'.

### **Laura**

Laura says she likes drawing and the writing that goes with drawing. She does not always understand the French that goes with the 'colouring' and when she had to colour things in she 'just picked any colour'. She says she finds listening to the tape 'going on and on and on' more difficult as they 'speak to you really fast and I can't make out what they're saying at all'. She also likes colouring in sheets but she does not really like working in a group 'because they always tell you what to do and I don't like it if they tell me what to do'. She says that whether she likes speaking up in front of the class depends on 'what I have to say in other words it's OK'. She does not seem worried about making mistakes. She says she 'usually just takes a think and then just puts her hand up'. She does not seem too sure whether she likes learning French or not. There are some parts she likes but others she dislikes although she does not really know why. Laura says that there is nothing much she likes in English and that maths is really her favourite subject. As she has spent time in Sweden and has Swedish cousins she says she would probably prefer Swedish to French as she is 'used to the language'. Nevertheless she says that she wants to carry on with French.

## **Kook Yeong**

Kook Yeong says that he started to learn French at school in Africa with a French teacher. He says he also had a French friend and he learned French at home with a French tutor every day. He thinks he is quite good at French and he thinks that it is fun especially 'learning how to say the words in French that you don't know'. Surprisingly Kook Yeong also answers with a clear 'no' when asked if he liked speaking French and says that he does not like speaking French because 'it's a little bit embarrassing'. He says he much prefers reading, writing, listening to tapes and 'playing time'. However, if the teacher asks him a question Kook Yeong feels he 'has to go for this answer to get top mark'. He says he puts his hand up when he is sure about an answer but 'when I don't know what she's talking about I feel that I'm going to get it wrong so I just really don't put my hand up'. He says he is happy with French and he wants to carry on with it. He also says that he and his brother see a French tutor every Thursday.

## **Sapna**

Sapna says she likes learning how to speak French and 'learning all types of drinks and food and names and things like that'. She says she likes speaking, listening, reading and writing and it is all good fun. She says she finds French sometimes easy, like saying her name, her age or something about herself but saying some of the words she finds a bit difficult. She does not mind speaking up in class or making a mistake because 'it's my first go, I'm trying to do something'. Sapna says she thinks she is 'a little' good at French because she

has the 'right accent'. She wants to carry on with French as 'it is nice to learn another language'.

### **Deborah**

Deborah says she likes learning French although she does not really know why. She says she does not find anything really difficult but when prompted she says 'speaking I can't do because I don't know all the French words'. She says she finds listening to the tape recorder quite easy. Deborah thinks she is doing well in French and wants to carry on with it although she does not sound too sure. She also says she would like to learn German because her 'mum already knows Germany'.

### **Sanji**

Sanji is not very forthcoming possibly due to problems with English. There seems to be much confusion during this interview. He seems to like things apart from writing which he thinks is too hard. He says he does not like speaking up in front of the class 'because of the children's laughing'.

### **Mairaj**

Mairaj says he likes doing French. He says he finds speaking French easy, although (as can be heard on the tape) he speaks with a strong accent. It seems that Mairaj is very aware of not sounding 'native-like' as he says that 'sometimes my pronunciation is not as well as on the tapes' and that he does not often put his hand up because he feels shy. He says that he sometimes

does not know how to pronounce a word and that he has to 'go over it again and again'. He says he likes working with the tape recorder if it includes 'those words that we have learned'. He also says he 'liked doing the 'J'aime' and 'Je n'aime pas' and that he found that pretty easy. Some things he found hard because he 'didn't understand and got some wrong in his French book'.

Mairaj thinks he is doing well in French 'because I understand a lot of things and I can say it properly' which, as the reader will notice, is not quite in accordance with what he said earlier or with what can be heard on the tape.

### **Thomas**

Thomas says he liked doing 'the sports like the tennis and all that' and he liked doing the 'J'aime' but he didn't like the 'Je n'aime pas' because there are not a lot of things he does not like. He says he likes speaking 'a bit' and that reading he liked 'half and half' but 'mostly he did not like it'. He finds listening to the tape hard 'because when it went fast you couldn't hear it and all'. He says he quite likes writing. He says he is beginning to put his hand up more as he is getting more confident. Thomas is not too sure about learning French and thinks that it is just 'OK'.

### **Scott**

Scott is also not very forthcoming. He says he likes the role-plays in the cafe and working in a group 'because then it's a lot less hard'. He also says he likes listening to the tape and that he finds it easy. He says that the most difficult part of learning French was understanding the teacher speak French. He says he

does not bother about putting his hand up in French, unlike in other subjects. Scott also says that he enjoys French a lot although this did not seem to be the case in lessons where he seemed to be one of the children that did not enjoy learning French and did not really get involved. Scott was the last child to be interviewed and it is possible that he would not have wanted to do the interview had he not been the only one to do so.

## **5.11 Findings from Interviews with Children in School One**

### **5.11.1 General Listening Skills**

It became apparent during the interviews that a number of children simply did not listen carefully to the questions posed by the interviewer. Some, for example, started to talk about what they generally liked and disliked such as video games, sports or animals when they were clearly asked to talk about their experiences in the French lessons. Interviews generally started with the writer 'setting the scene' in saying something like 'we are going to talk about the French lessons and you learning French, the things you like and the things you might not like, for example'. A number of children clearly focused only on the second part of this statement and did not realise that their likes and dislikes were to refer to learning French. This might suggest that these children had difficulties in 'dis-embedding' language and in using language clues rather than contextual clues in clarifying meaning. Focused listening might have also been a problem for some. Those who seemed to find it difficult to listen on a one to one basis might also find listening in class problematic. The importance of being able to listen to instruction in formal learning situations was discussed in

Chapter Four and the 'inability' to do so could explain why some children did not remember much of what they had been taught.

### **5.11.2 Enthusiasm**

The number of hands up during classroom observations suggested that most children were enthusiastic about learning French and enjoyed the experience. During talks with individual children a slightly different picture emerged, however. Some said that they enjoyed everything and thought that French was 'fun' but some did not seem too sure about the whole experience and were rather hesitant when asked if they wanted to continue learning French. For a couple of children learning French was simply 'alright' or 'OK' and some would have preferred a different language for a variety of reasons such as friends or family connections. At the same time some children claimed that they definitely wanted to continue learning French when their body language seemed to tell a slightly different story. Their 'positive' verbal responses might have been made therefore simply to please the interviewer. One boy said that 'getting things right made French more enjoyable'. This comment re-emphasises the importance of 'success' in determining attitudes (see Burstall et al., 1974). However, whether the general level of enthusiasm is a reflection of age rather than of circumstantial variables such as children's more advantaged background, the type of experiences that they had such as plenty of fun and games and of the fact that they were taught by their class teacher, remains difficult to establish. 'Mixed' responses suggest that not all children in this class were very enthusiastic about learning a foreign language. However, as in

previous discussions it also has to be kept in mind that their comments, favourable or unfavourable, relate to the learning of French. One can only speculate how children would have responded to learning a different language.

### **5.11.3 Self-concept**

A positive self-concept is regarded an important ingredient in all learning, not just foreign language learning. Naiman et al. (1978), for example, reported that poor learners lacked 'self-confidence' and Oller, Hudson & Liu reported that 'the more positive a subject's self-concept, the higher the subject's achievement in ESL' (Oller et al., 1977: 14). More recently, Clement, Dornyei & Noels (1994) suggested that a positive self-concept was a major motivational subsystem in foreign language learning 'where there is little direct contact with the target culture' such as is the case with children learning French in Britain.

With few exceptions, the great majority of children, boys and girls, were confident in their ability to learn French and thought that they were 'good' at it although lesson observations had shown that some children clearly struggled to manage even the most basic learning material. A number of children who knew some words in another language also claimed, for example, that they could 'speak' that language and one boy claimed that he could speak 6 or 7 languages altogether. These findings indicate that young children are generally very confident in their abilities, rightly or wrongly. Studies from child development (Harris, 1993) suggest that up to the age of around seven children



find it very hard to compare like with like and that they generally do not grasp that they might have done worse than others, for example. Their assessments of their relative performance in the classroom are therefore often quite unrealistic. From the age of seven upwards, on the other hand, children seem to be less positive about their performances and the incidents of social comparisons increase. It will be seen in Chapter Six that some of the slightly older children indeed seemed much more realistic in their evaluation of themselves and the learning process.

A positive self-concept would seem an important and valuable foundation on which to build foreign language learning. However, a positive self-concept would also seem to be closely related to experiences of success. Providing and maintaining positive experiences for all children over time is not an easy matter if one focuses on linguistic progression in one particular language. The issue whether focus on one language is desirable within the context of British primary schools will be raised again in the concluding paragraphs.

#### **5.11.4 Finding French 'Easy'**

Despite generally high levels of confidence, not all of the younger children said that they found learning French easy. Interviews produced comments such as 'it's a little bit hard', 'it's a challenge', 'it's a little difficult', 'I get eas'ly confused', 'I don't understand anything, nothing'. A number of children said that they found pronunciation problematic or that they keep forgetting things. The children who made these comments were probably slightly more mature and therefore more

realistic in their 'assessment' of the learning situation. Such comments would seem to challenge the view that young children simply 'absorb a new language like a sponge' (Satchwell, 1996: 169). If a programme claims to lay sound foundations for later foreign language study, as so many do, it would seem important to establish what exactly it is that a child finds difficult or a 'challenge' and address these 'difficulties'.

#### **5.11.5 Speaking in Front of the Class and Willingness 'to have a Go'**

As was discussed in previous chapters, children are said to have low affective filters and low levels of anxiety and they are said to be more spontaneous and less inhibited than older learners, at least in natural learning environments. Higher levels of anxiety are said to be related to academic language learning contexts with formal instruction where 'classroom anxiety, a high fear of rejection and similar feelings may be related to failure' (Naiman et al., 1978). Anxiety is viewed as a 'learned' emotional response to this context, based on self-perception, beliefs, feelings and behaviour (Ely 1986, Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope 1986, Young 1991). The most anxiety provoking tasks in language classrooms are said to involve public communication, having to speak in front of others in a foreign language.

During interview most children claimed that they were quite happy to speak in front of the class. However, some children, even at the early stages of learning, are quite 'aware' of speaking aloud in front of the class. It had been reported from Scotland, for example, that individual children:

"...expressed some reservations about using the target language...but this related exclusively to 'performing' in front of the rest of the class whether this was a speaking activity or some form of reading aloud." (Low et al., 1995: 78)

During interviews some children also said that they did not like speaking in front of the class or being asked questions by the teacher although it is difficult to establish how 'worried' they were about this. Observations and responses to interview questions seem to suggest that age might be of little relevance to whether a child speaks or not but that speaking in front of the class might be a question of learner personality. Gass (1989) suggested that in output especially, individual differences between learners, such as confidence, played a role. During interviews some children commented on being 'shy' or 'nervous' and, as was found out during lesson observations, there are after all those children who hardly ever talk and remain silent even when they know an answer.

Willingness to 'have a go' and not worrying about making mistakes is usually seen as an advantage in second language learning and those that are prepared to take risks are said to be the better learners (Naiman, et al., 1978). Lesson observations in School One suggested that most children did 'have a go' and did 'try'. During interviews many claimed that they would persevere and that they would just continue 'trying' if they were experiencing problems or if they had made a mistake they would just try again. The possibility that some

children were giving 'socially desirable responses' cannot be excluded, however.

Interviews with individual children also revealed that in a school context not all children seemed equally willing to 'have a go' and take a risk. Some children, for example, responded that they would only put their hand up if they were 'sure' about an answer. In a school environment some young children are quite aware of the risk of 'taking risks' and of making mistakes. Comments during interviews also suggested that some children who did seem to mind making mistakes did so because of the risk of being laughed at by their peers. Their concerns seemed to centre around affective or personal factors rather than around accurate use of language as such. At the same time the possibility that some children speak up in class simply to score good grades cannot be excluded. Kook Yoeng, who said that if the teacher asked him a question he felt he 'had to go for this answer to get top mark', serves as an example.

Cultural differences also need to be taken into account. Holmes (1978) suggests that some children in some cultures, for example Chinese, might not talk in class until they are sure of the answer as they do not want to be seen as making a mistake or be laughed at. Cultural expectations, pupil personality, teacher personality, methodologies and approaches to error feedback and not least classroom atmosphere, all seem to play an important role in whether a child chooses to speak in class or not.

Seliger's (1983) distinction between High Input Generators (HIG) and Low Input Generators (LIG) assumed that participation was related to successful language learning. However, whether those who are the higher risk-takers necessarily experience higher levels of success still seems open to debate. Ely (1986), for example, found a correlation between risk-taking and classroom participation but did not find a relation to language learning success. A number of studies on classroom interaction reported in Chaudron (1988) suggest a correlation between interaction and learning outcomes but do not establish cause and effect relationships in the sense that more interaction leads to higher levels of achievement.

Swain (1985) emphasised the importance of output in second language learning in moving from semantic processing to syntactic accuracy but the relationship between the 'amount' of output and participation and successful learning seems far from clear. While involvement is necessary for successful learning, the degree of involvement is difficult to specify and not always observable as Van Lier (1988) suggested. The assumption that overt participation is likely to lead to improved learning might therefore be wrong (Van Lier, 1988: 93) and it remains questionable whether 'more' is therefore necessarily 'better'.

Classroom observations, conversations with children as well as findings from interviews suggest that in the primary school classroom not all are 'naturally' spontaneous, ready to 'have a go' and take risks and not worried about making

mistakes. Responses of individual children suggest the desirability of a 'balanced' approach which also includes aspects of reading and writing.

#### **5.11.6 Listening, Reading and Writing in French**

Unsurprisingly perhaps, children both liked and disliked the tape recorder.

A number of children said that they found listening to the tape recorder 'easy' and one boy said he liked the tape because of the 'music' on it. Some, however, said they found listening to the tape recorder quite difficult and one girl commented on the tape 'going on and on' and how she 'could not make out what they were saying'.

These comments are somehow in contrast to findings from the Pilot Scheme where it was claimed that all children regardless of ability disliked the tape recorder. However, 'liking' or 'disliking' the tape recorder could well be a reflection of the type of activities that accompany listening. In the Pilot Scheme the tape recorder spelt 'boredom' and 'enforced passivity' whereas in School One listening to the tape recorder was usually associated with a worksheet. It would also seem important to note that individual children's comments were perhaps based on specific instances of listening they remembered. Classroom observations suggested, for example, that on a number of occasions some children found listening activities difficult although language material generally reflected what had been taught. As in most other contexts, a closer examination of what exactly it is that a child finds difficult would seem necessary if one is to help that child in coming to terms with learning a foreign language.

It would also seem worth noting that simply liking something does not necessarily make one good at it.

Surprisingly, many children in School One said that they liked writing in French. These positive responses to the more 'demanding' aspects of language learning could well be a reflection of the generally high levels of literacy in this class. Only a few children said that they found writing 'difficult'. One boy said, for example, that reading and writing were boring, one said that writing was hard and one claimed that writing 'made your hands get tired'. When concerns were expressed these usually had to do with spelling, getting accents right or being able to copy correctly from the board. Interestingly, some of the 'less able' children said that they liked reading and writing. This would re-emphasise the importance of written language in supporting learning discussed in Chapter Four both from a cognitive and affective viewpoint. Whether all children clearly differentiated in their responses between writing generally and writing in French, however, is difficult to establish. In any case, early exposure to a foreign language which is based on listening and speaking only would seem neither necessary nor desirable with a large number of children in this class.

Many children said they preferred it when the teacher 'spoke' English. However, these responses need to be taken with a degree of caution as it is not clear whether children distinguished between the teacher 'speaking' in French and the teacher 'explaining' in French. These are clearly different issues. Nevertheless, the possibility remains that children generally feel more

comfortable when lessons proceed mainly in English and that, contrary to Krashen's prediction, in the classroom 'maximum' use of the target language might increase levels of anxiety rather than lower them, especially amongst young children. As argued before, the use of the target language both qualitative and quantitative would very much depend on the aims of a scheme.

#### **5.11.7 Awareness of Language and the Learning Process**

Interviews seem to suggest that, expectedly, some children had a higher degree of 'awareness' of the nature of language and of what language learning might be about. A couple of children, possibly through attending classes outside school, for example in Hebrew, had developed a degree of understanding of some grammatical concepts such as masculine and feminine. One boy said that 'English words were similar to French words' and that he liked 'experimenting with words and trying to pronounce them'. Another child stated that 'if you are reading you are not showing everyone that you know French' while one boy stated that 'listening to the tape tests your hearing'. On the other hand there was also Thomas who said that he did not enjoy doing the 'Je n' aime pas' as there were not many things he disliked! Some children said that they had French books or dictionaries at home which they consulted and some recognised the importance of practice and said that they practised French with a member of the family. The importance of social strategies such as co-operation (O' Malley & Chamot, 1991) was also recognised by some children who stated that 'in a group we can help each other', in a group 'it's a lot less hard' and 'sometimes I need a little help'.



The importance of learning strategies in the classroom has already been discussed. It would seem important that some strategies, appropriate to children's developmental stage, such as basic dictionary skills and ways of practising, for example, should figure prominently in any early scheme.

### **5.12 Summary of Findings in School One**

Lesson observations and interviews with individual children in School One suggest that they all respond very differently to the experience of learning French. Most children seemed enthusiastic although it could be argued that generally high levels of enthusiasm might be a reflection of background and experience rather than one of age. Children in School One came from a more advantaged background and the nature of the activities in the classroom was generally 'playful'. Nevertheless, some were quite reserved in expressing enthusiasm for the subject and some were simply not too sure about the whole experience of learning French. Some children quite clearly would have liked to learn a different language altogether. Classroom observations also suggested that not all children found learning French easy and this was confirmed during interviews where children commented on experiencing some difficulties such as pronunciation and remembering language material. It is then, of course, difficult for children to be enthusiastic and motivated about something they might have difficulty understanding fully or something that might be of little immediate and obvious relevance to them.

Liking something does not necessarily make one good at it but liking something, at least at primary school, would seem to facilitate the task. Interviews suggested that there does not seem to be one particular aspect, possibly with the exception of games, that is universally liked or d'sliked. Some children said they liked working with the tape recorder, some disliked the tape recorder. Many said they liked speaking in class, nevertheless some said they disliked speaking in front of others. Not all were happy to 'have a go', some seemed worried about making mistakes and some children said they wanted to be very sure before they volunteer an answer. Learning French did not seem to be an 'easy' and 'effortless' experience for all. The following Chapter Six will focus on the case study of the second primary school before a final conclusion will be drawn.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **Case Study Two - School Two**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter will focus on case study two. Findings from lesson observations and from questionnaires in School Two will be presented and analysed. The analysis of data in case study two was underpinned by the same considerations as in the first case study. However, as the primary schools in the two case studies represent very different learning contexts, findings will not be presented and discussed under exactly the same headings as those in Chapter Five. The chapter will conclude with a summary and discussion of the findings from both schools and the brief 'questionnaire' administered to children at secondary school. The following paragraphs will first of all introduce School Two.

#### **6.2 School Two - Background**

##### **6.2.1 Social and Demographic Factors**

School Two is a co-educational state junior school with children aged seven to eleven. In 1996 there were 271 children on roll. School Two is located in a socially disadvantaged area in London, with a large ethnic community, a high number of lone parents and long-term unemployment. In 1996 out of the 271 children on roll 173 were on free school meals and 100 children were identified as having special educational needs. The school projects a very positive, multicultural and multilingual ethos.

### **6.2.2 National Curriculum Assessment Results**

In 1996 the school came near the bottom of the national league tables. In English only 22% of the children achieved Level 4, in Mathematics 30% and in Science 24%. In 1997, however, level 4 or above was gained in English by 56%, in Mathematics by 69% and in Science by 65% of the pupils at the end of key stage 2 (Guardian Education, 27 January, 1998).

### **6.2.3 Languages Present**

There are over 200 children from ethnic minorities and over 30 languages spoken amongst the children in this school. Languages spoken include, for example, Arabic, Farsi, French, Gujarati, Hindi, Kurdish, Peshawa, Polish, Punjabi, Russian, Somali, Spanish, Tamil and Urdu. According to the teachers in School Two, there could be around 15 first languages present in any class at any time.

### **6.2.4 Class Composition and the Teacher**

In School Two five different year 6 classes aged 10 to 11 were observed over a period of 2 years. According to the teachers, the reading ages in these classes ranged from 7 to 14. National Curriculum levels in English were between 1 and 4, with most children around level 3. The teacher who took the French lessons was male, with a French Diploma qualification. He was teaching French to all year 6 children in the school on a rota basis.

### **6.2.5 Patterns of Provision in French**

In School Two, French was offered to children in year 6 on a weekly basis, for one hour, for the duration of one term. As the teacher involved was not the children's class teacher, French was taught at a fixed time every week. It is important to add that this weekly lesson was the last lesson of the day, as this might well have affected attention spans, levels of enthusiasm and, by implication, learning outcomes to some extent.

In School Two lessons were observed over a period of two years from September 1996 to July 1998 with 5 groups although each group was not observed for an equal number of lessons. Lesson observation notes focus on two groups taught in 1997/98 and can be found in Appendix D.

### **6.2.6 Learning Context**

Not all year 6 groups experienced equal numbers of lessons in French due to cancellations for a variety of reasons. All groups, however, dealt with the topic of personal information, names and ages of pupils and where they lived and numbers. Classroom objects were introduced with most groups and with some groups brothers and sisters and the names of animals were also introduced.

All the lessons with each year 6 group followed a similar pattern. The first lesson would focus on information on France and the geographical location of other French-speaking countries. This lesson would be carried out in English. This would be followed by an introduction of greetings in French and extended to include greetings in all the languages present in the class with contributions

from native-speakers of the various languages. Children would then learn how to count, how to tell and ask somebody's name, age and domicile. They would learn to identify classroom objects and/or learn the names of animals.

Teaching in School Two did include some explicit grammar teaching such as genders, definite and indefinite articles and personal pronouns. This had not been the case in School One. Reading and writing activities were rare and usually limited to isolated words or phrases on worksheets or on the chalkboard.

#### **6.2.7 Teacher Use of English**

English was used to explain classroom procedures and sometimes to check whether children had understood French language input. Pupils were encouraged to make contributions in French but if these were made in English they were also welcome. The possible advantages, disadvantages and implications of the use of the 'first' language or the target language in the monolingual and multilingual classroom is not within the scope of this study. It would seem important to state, however, that as a considerable number of children experienced difficulties with English either as their first or their second language, making reference to English might, at times, have complicated rather than clarified matters.

### **6.3 Observed Outcomes - School Two**

As was stated in Chapter Five, a small case study cannot match large-scale projects on a national level and a formal evaluation of learning outcomes was not feasible due to the many variables involved. As in School One, only those aspects which could be observed, analysed and interpreted without 'strict scientific control' will be discussed under headings similar to those in Case Study One, such as children's French, enthusiasm and willingness 'to have a go', attention spans, social learning outcomes, learning strategies and guessing, reading and writing. Language awareness amongst children in School Two will also be briefly discussed as the nature of the learning process in this school allowed for some comments to be made.

#### **6.3.1 Childrens' French**

As in School One, comments will be restricted to those aspects of language learning which seemed to be recurring patterns and themes. Unsurprisingly perhaps, given that they only had one lesson a week, as in School One, many children in School Two also found it very difficult to remember what they had been taught from lesson to lesson. However, in School Two many children also found it difficult to remember language material within a lesson from lesson start to finish. Generally numbers and single words seemed to be remembered more than sentences although numbers did present problems for some children. Most children could count in chorus but only few could do so on an individual basis. On one occasion the number 3 was translated as 11, 10 and 6 by three

different children suggesting much guesswork. Grammatical structures and genders seemed to pose difficulties as much as they did in School One. However, the point that the French gender system can pose problems for learners of all ages has already been made in earlier Chapters.

Despite extensive practice the structural properties of language were simply left out by some children, however, as was stated during the discussions of findings in School One, at the early stages older learners also seem to limit their utterances to single items of vocabulary. 'Mixed chunks' such as 'un deux soeurs', 'a-t-il j'ai onze ans', 'il j'ai onze ans', 'où habite à Hammersmith' were as common as in School One. Pronouns also caused problems and 'quel âge a-t-elle?' would be answered with 'j' ai...'. However, older children learning French also produce mixed chunks such as 'j'ai adore la tennis' (see Myles, Hooper & Mitchell, 1998, for more detailed examples) and, as stated earlier, 'gains made in grammatical understanding and sentence manipulation are often accompanied by 'some loss of accuracy in surface details of pupils' speech (Mitchell & Dickson, 1997: 2). These utterances might therefore best be regarded as stages in the learning process rather than as outcomes as such. Whether, when and how individual children might have progressed, however, was not established. It was also not possible during lesson observations to establish to what degree French utterances might have been affected by the many first languages present in the multi-lingual classroom in School Two. What became more obvious during observations in School Two, however, was some children's inability to use a chunk of language or a prefabricated pattern



when it would have been quite appropriate to do so. A question such as 'quel âge as-tu?', for example, was not infrequently answered with 'je m'appelle...'.

A considerable amount of confusion seemed to exist in dealing with a variety of questions. A range of basic questions and answers on personal information were extensively practised at the start of every lesson every week, for example. Nevertheless, there were a number of children who could not remember either to answer or ask simple questions about somebody's name or age such as 'comment t'appelles-tu?', 'quel âge as-tu?' or 'où habites-tu?'. Some children in School Two did not seem to be aware of the difference between a statement and a question.

The observer would also practise some questions and answers with individual children over a period of time but only few could provide appropriate answers or remember how to form a question. There seemed to be considerable confusion amongst some children and, as lesson observation notes show, the same children kept asking the observer the same questions week after week. These children had problems trying to remember the most basic language material such as asking somebody their name or answering in response despite these language items having been practised at the start of every lesson. It is possible, however, that a more tightly structured and graded approach to whole-class question and answer sessions might have led to better results.

As in School One, despite a 'near-native' model and a native-speaker model present in one class, pronunciation was often incorrect and did not resemble the model given. As in School One some children became very 'skilled' at hiding behind sloppy pronunciation, little difference was made between chien/chat, for example, between je/j'ai or un/une although the teacher tended to encourage children to improve on this. On one occasion, for example, children listened to a tape and tried to identify masculine and feminine genders. Such explicit focus on the structural properties of language and seeing language written down seemed to improve children's correct use of language, gender in this case. There would seem to be much scope for further research into the source of pronunciation errors in the multilingual classroom and the need for corrective feedback as suggested by Bley-Vroman (1989) and Schachter (1990) has already been emphasised in previous chapters.

As in School One, while some children did 'notice' mistakes either their own or those of their peers, others could not see 'anything wrong' with what they had said even after errors had been pointed out to them, nor did they remember feedback and corrections. Given the choice between a correct and an incorrect utterance, many chose the incorrect version although they had heard and repeated the correct version again and again over time. Classroom observations in School Two also suggested that children varied in their affective response to error correction. While some did not regard the teacher's usually very sensitive feedback as personal criticism or reflection on themselves, others were quick to go into 'a sulk' and withdrew from classroom proceedings.

Such behaviour might suggest that some children are more prepared for formal learning than others.

On a number of occasions the body language of some children showed that they were quite clearly using target language they did not understand and a smile, for example, would accompany a negative response. It also seemed the case that some children reacted to the body language of the teacher more than to what was being said. The first thing they seemed to 'read' was the teacher's body language rather than the verbal message. While some aspects of body language, such as smiles, would seem universal, others are culturally determined (see Bialystok & Hakuta, 1994, for example). In the multicultural and multilingual classroom this might lead to conflicts between the body language of a child's first language, the body language of the teacher and the body language of the target language. The importance of avoiding ambiguous and conflicting messages would have implications for teacher training and education. Whether those children who tend to rely on body language in decoding messages are also those who find it generally difficult to 'dis-embed' language from its immediate context leaves much scope for further research.

### **6.3.2 Enthusiasm and Willingness 'to have a Go'**

In the affective domain of learning there seemed to be much difference between individual children in School Two and between those who were prepared to have a go and those who did not bother whatever the reasons. Some children were very responsive and almost always put their hands up in response to the

teacher's questions whereas others never once volunteered an answer and, even when asked directly by the teacher, did not respond. It was interesting to notice in School Two that a French native-speaking child who had arrived only a few months previously with no English and who was now acquiring English in a 'natural' context, had 'a go' most of the time whether questions or answers were required in English or French. He simply used what he could of either language.

Homework, although given sparingly, was generally greeted by children with 'Oh no', suggesting that the majority were not prepared to invest extra time learning French. However, this reluctance to do 'extra' work could have applied to other subjects as well and, as was stated earlier, the French lesson was the last lesson of the day and this might well have affected to some extent levels of enthusiasm as well as degrees of involvement.

### **6.3.3 Attention Spans**

It was already stated in Chapter Five that levels of attention are difficult to judge (Allright & Bailey, 1991) but as far as this was observable, attention spans seemed to range considerably amongst children from the very attentive to the withdrawn. There were also those children who spent a lesson or part of a lesson outside the classroom because of bad behaviour and the number of those who missed a lesson for various reasons was considerable. In School Two many children found it difficult to pay attention to what was going on in the lesson. Some found it difficult to simply look at the board when asked to do so

and some children, through their body language, quite clearly imparted a sense of boredom. There were a number of children who, for whatever reason, had to be reprimanded or moved several times during a lesson. Some showed little or no interest throughout the term and were almost permanently off task. Working in silence, for example during a tape exercise or during copying, proved to be very difficult for some. Due to the very short attention spans amongst some children, practice of language material, necessary for patterns to be established, became at times problematic.

The gap between those that were able to work in whole class contexts, in groups, in pairs or on their own without disrupting the work of others and those that found this difficult was considerable. Holmes comments on the differences in turn-taking skills amongst young children:

"Observation of eight to nine-year-olds in classrooms provide abundant evidence that, even after three or four years of primary schooling, children still have difficulty in refraining from calling out responses to teachers' questions..."  
(Holmes, 1978: 141)

For those children who experienced difficulties in these areas, 'younger' did not seem to be 'better' as they lacked most of the basic personal and social skills necessary for formal foreign language learning.

It was stated in Chapter Four that attention spans improve with age (Harris, 1993). On the surface, however, the children in School One seemed to be the

more attentive while the children in School Two seemed much less so. This suggests that attention spans might not simply be the result of age but of a whole host of other factors, not least of children's personal experiences and background. What on the surface would appear to be a case of 'younger is better' might therefore be less a case of age but one of background and experience.

There also seemed to be differences between groups in their ability to pay attention to what was going on in the classroom, possibly as a reflection of their experiences from other lessons. As was already stated, however, the French lesson in School Two was the last lesson of the day and cause and effect relations are therefore difficult to establish.

#### **6.3.4 Social Learning Outcomes**

Classrooms are places for potential social conflict but also places for social learning. During lesson observations 'output' was not only seen as linguistic 'output' in the form of the target language children produced but also in terms of other types of learning that might have taken place such as improvement in the ability to work in pairs or on an individual basis. In the area of 'social competence' and 'social learning' major differences existed between children and it is in this area where some children in School Two made good and observable progress. Observations in School Two suggested that some children benefitted considerably from the 'social aspects' of foreign language learning. Over a period of weeks some children clearly started to fiddle less

and to stop calling out at any time during a lesson. They made progress in their ability to pay attention and to listen to the teacher and to other children or to recorded material without disrupting. They learned how to take their turn or how to work responsibly in groups, pairs or on an individual basis. These pupils quite clearly benefitted in their personal and social development from being in a foreign language class.

However, these positive spin-offs from learning French cannot be confused with children making much progress in learning the French language as such.

Through the learning of French these children learned some of the 'prerequisites' for successful learning while others had already mastered these important 'social' skills. 'Starting early' therefore would seem to have very different implications for different children.

### **6.3.5 Learning Strategies and Guessing**

Learning strategies had not been systematically investigated but when the teacher created opportunities for children to pause, to stand back from what they were doing and to reflect on what they were doing, for example, only few children could take advantage of this. Many filled the 'gap' through what might be called 'unrelated activities' such as checking on one's appearance or messing with somebody else's pencil case. As in School One, avoidance strategies were evident from some children who 'ducked' out of answering a question or volunteering for a specific activity or role. Questions by the observer revealed that some of them simply could not be bothered.

In terms of general learning skills, such as following instructions, knowing how to tick a box, how to circle or cross an item or knowing how to follow lines or how to complete individual items on a worksheet, there was much scope for learning for many of the children in this school. Some children, however, in this case girls, were clearly developing their capacity for personal study. They kept a note book in addition to the class folder and decided of their own accord to make notes of what the teacher had said or to copy things down from the chalkboard. They kept an ongoing record of the French they were learning and used their notes as reference material in lessons, for example to check the gender of a word. These girls quite clearly showed some awareness of what was involved in learning a foreign language and recognised the importance of the written word in supporting their learning and in making progress. Learning French thus meant very different things for the individual children in School Two.

As in School One, lesson observations showed that many children tended to guess 'wildly'. They would offer the name of a place in answer to a question of time, for example, or a time in answer to a question of place. Numbers were frequently given by children instead of places or names. 'Comment s'appelle-t-il?' was guessed as meaning 'I haven't got a dog', 'quel âge as-tu?' as 'where do I live', 'quel âge a-t-il?' as 'where does he come from' and 'je n'ai pas de...' as 'is this your mum?' despite this language material having been heard and practised frequently. During a listening activity where children on a tape registered at a youth hostel the teacher asked the class if they knew what



a youth hostel was. Suggestions were 'a city', 'a lost property office' and 'a mental home'. These responses reflect the very limited schematic knowledge that these children could have used in dealing with the activity.

However, the number of children pretending that they 'knew' when they did not know seemed much smaller in School Two. If they did not know what to do, the older children either owned up and asked for help, looked puzzled or simply opted out of an activity. Some of the older children also 'practised' language material, for example pronunciation, without the teacher necessarily asking them to do so. Practise is something which according to Rubin (1975) and Naiman et al. (1978) the 'good' language learners do.

### **6.3.6 Reading and Writing**

Reading and writing activities in School Two were rather limited possibly due to the fact that children only experienced French for one term and the teacher thought that, generally, this time should be spent on speaking and listening activities. When children did engage in writing, copying correctly presented a problem for a number of children and, as in School One, while some needed basic support with copywriting others could have moved at a much faster pace. Both affective and cognitive factors regarding the written language in foreign language development have already been discussed and it has already been stated that the role of reading and writing deserves serious consideration in any early scheme.

### **6.3.7 Language Awareness**

One of the initial lessons with each of the year 6 classes focused on how greetings are carried out in the various first languages of the children in the classroom. This lesson seemed of much benefit to all children for a number of reasons. One, it shone a positive light on the linguistic diversity represented in the class and two, a degree of awareness of language was fostered in making children aware of how the act of 'greeting' was carried out in different or in similar ways to that of their first language. The multilingual classroom in School Two thus presented a natural context for talking about language:

"...in terms of increasing (raising) the amount of conscious knowledge in each individual through new and explicit input, from teachers, or better still, from one's peers, via the perceptive teacher's mediation." (James & Garrett, 1991: 7)

As a result of this lesson children were made aware of some differences and similarities between cultures and languages and for some implicit knowledge would have been turned into explicit knowledge. Laughing at each other's efforts to speak another language and racist gestures or remarks, for example, were also absent at least during the lessons observed.

How 'knowing' two languages might affect the learning of a third language is not within the scope of this research and much would seem to depend on the stage of children's development in each language, on their degree of bilingualism and on the language pairs involved. Research in Holland by Meijers & Sanders and Edelenbos, Pijl & Vinje suggested that:

"...for pupils from ethnic minorities the use of at least two other languages (mother language and Dutch) does not seriously affect learning English as a third or fourth language." (reported in Edelenbos & Cor J. Suhre, 1996: 56)

Observations in School Two suggested that 'knowing' two languages had at least some 'affective' advantages for some children.

## **6.4 Questionnaires**

A questionnaire was administered to 3 classes in School Two, a total of 48 children, at the end of the school year 1998. Both the writer and the children's class teacher were present while the questionnaires were completed to give support to those children who might be in need of help. The following pages will focus on this questionnaire.

### **6.4.1 Analysis of Data from Questionnaires**

The children in one of the classes did not provide much information possibly due to the time lapse between learning French and completing the questionnaire. The responses of these children were subsequently not included in the analysis of the data. Some children in the other classes did not manage to respond to all parts of the questionnaire and on some occasions complete answers or parts of answers were unintelligible. Completion of each and every question on the questionnaire was not deemed important, however, as the focus was not on numbers of responses to a particular question but rather on what the children said. The reader can find the answers each individual child

gave to each of the questions in Appendix F where findings are presented separately for boys and girls in order to identify any potentially significant differences in answers. The original spellings found on the questionnaires were maintained as far as these were legible. No special 'categories' were created for the interpretation of the data and the responses given by children were summarised and discussed under headings similar to the questions posed on the questionnaire: 'enthusiasm', 'is French easy', 'listening to French', 'speaking in French', 'reading in French', 'writing in French', 'homework', 'the things children liked most', 'the things children liked least', 'things they thought they had learned', 'finding out about French speaking people and countries where French is spoken', 'learning French at secondary school' and 'language choice'. Responses to the question whether they enjoyed learning French and whether they would like to learn more French were incorporated under the heading of 'enthusiasm'. Responses to 'the things you would like to be able to do or say in French' were included under 'finding out about French speaking people and countries where French is spoken'.

As in School One, to arrive at a better understanding of what individual children might be like, of their needs and interests and of their strengths and weaknesses, profiles of children were then constructed based on the answers given on their questionnaire. The following pages will focus on the analysis of the data gathered through the questionnaire and then present the profiles of individual children before findings from Chapter Five and Chapter Six will be summarised.

## **6.5 Findings from Questionnaires**

### **6.5.1 Enthusiasm**

The majority of children, both boys and girls, said that they enjoyed learning French. There were children who thought that French was 'brilliant', a 'fascinating language' and that it was 'new', 'different', 'interesting', 'fun' and 'enjoyable'. There were children who said that they enjoyed French as it was 'a good language to know because we go there a lot' or because it would 'help in high school'. These comments indicate that children enjoy French for very different reasons. While some see the functional value of knowing a language others simply enjoy the challenge. There were also some children, however, who thought French was 'hard', two boys thought French was 'boring' and one girl said that she 'couldn't see the point of it'. Enjoyment and enthusiasm were therefore not 'universal'.

### **6.5.2 Is French Easy?**

Specific comments from those who said that they found French easy included 'some of the words are like English', 'the teacher explains very well', 'you get help' or 'my family knows some of it'. Others said 'talking at the same time with the class is easy because I feel more confident', it is easy to say 'hello and good bye and how I'm feeling because it makes me confident' and one child also stated that 'games and writing wasn't hard'.

There were some children who thought that they remembered things easily as they were 'not much different to my own language'. Some stated that 'speaking

French and remembering the words is easy because it's not much different to my language' or 'French is similar to Portuguese'. For the children who spoke French Patois or Portuguese similarity between languages seems to help rather than interfere at least in the early stages of the learning process.

Many children said that they found French difficult, that they did not remember things easily and that they tended to forget. One girl, for example, stated that she found learning French confusing 'because I keep forgetting the words' and another simply claimed that 'she was not very good at French'. When asked about what it was that they found easy or difficult, children seemed to find numbers relatively easy to remember but remembering words and sentences, especially, many found difficult. 'Saying' things in French was deemed easier than 'remembering' words or sentences. Boys, especially, said that they found saying and remembering sentences difficult and that saying and remembering words only was easier. One boy said he found sentences difficult, because 'we had to say some difficult [sic] words'. The girls generally found copying things down easy but reading in French, understanding people on the tape and understanding the teacher was generally found difficult by both boys and girls. There were a number of children who said they found it hard to pronounce new words. Specific reasons why French was difficult were given as 'French words are hard to say', French is 'hard to remember and pronounce', 'the words are different', 'I keep getting mixed up with words and sentences', it is 'hard to understand', 'I don't remember anything' or 'French is not my language'.

Other things children found hard was 'spelling in French because of the letters', 'writing because the letters are confusing', 'asking different questions of boys and girls' (a reference to the use of pronouns) and 'answering sentences because I get the words mixed up'. Interestingly, two girls said that they found singing songs difficult. One child ticked everything on the questionnaire as 'difficult' with the exception of 'saying words'. These comments seem to suggest that some of the older children seemed much more realistic in their assessment of their 'abilities' in French and more aware of what might be involved in learning a language. They also point to a wide range of potential difficulties individual children might experience as well as to those aspects of French which they deem 'easy'. If an early 'start' is to lay sound foundations it would seem crucial to identify more precisely the specific nature of the problems individual children might encounter; these were not within the scope of this study.

### **6.5.3 Listening to French**

The tape recorder did not play a great role in School Two and comments about listening to tapes were sparse. Unsurprisingly, some children seemed to enjoy listening to the tape while others found the tape recorder hard as it was 'difficult to understand'. Listening was usually accompanied by an activity or a worksheet and it is possible that on some occasions it was the task rather than the listening material which some children found difficult.

#### **6.5.4 Speaking In French**

Most children said they liked speaking French as this was 'fun', French was 'a nice language' and 'interesting' and speaking allowed them to practise.

Not all, however were keen on speaking in class. Some said that French was 'hard to pronounce', that the 'words were hard to say', that they were 'quite shy' and 'embarrassed' and got nervous when having to speak in class. Some said that it was 'boring', one boy stated that he thought 'French sounded dull' and one girl thought that French sounded 'weird'. One child said that what he looked forward to least in secondary school was speaking in French. These comments would seem to question a wholly spoken approach as advocated by the Council of Europe (Doyé & Hurrell, 1997) and emphasise the importance of meeting the needs of all children including those who prefer (and possibly rely on) the support of the written language.

#### **6.5.5 Reading in French**

Although many children expressed difficulties with reading, they also said that they would have liked to do more of it for a variety of reasons. Responses made by children point to both cognitive and affective benefits of the written language and specific comments include statements such as 'it would have helped to learn more', 'it would have helped with spellings', 'it would have made my reading skills easier', 'it would have helped with meaning', 'it's interesting', 'so I can get over the difficulties', 'I can improve', 'it will help me learn'. These comments suggest that a number of the slightly older children in School Two seemed to be aware of the benefits of reading, possibly as a result of their



experiences in their English lessons. However, there were also those who were glad that the class did not do any more reading because 'I don't know how to read in French', 'I didn't know what I was reading' and one said that 'that there was not much point reading something that you didn't understand'. One girl said reading was not exactly 'easy', one boy said that he preferred speaking and another said that he preferred reading in English. These more negative comments suggest that it might not be so much the reading activity itself that they disliked but not understanding what was being read. The importance of a gradual introduction of the written word and the potential difficulties a language without a close grapheme/phoneme match might present would need to be taken into consideration.

#### **6.5.6 Writing in French**

As with reading, despite some difficulties expressed, a number of children said that they would have liked to do more writing. Specific comments made were such as 'writing had a powerful attraction', 'I thought that was the most interesting part', 'then we will know how to spell', 'we will understand the words more', 'I could write as well as speak' 'it's fun', 'it's easy', 'I like writing', 'so I could improve', 'I'll learn how to write more', 'I can practise'. One boy said he looked forward to 'righting' [sic] at secondary school because 'it's a new thing'.

However, as with reading, some said they were glad that they did not do any more writing as 'I didn't enjoy it', 'I get confused fast', 'I can't spell a word', 'I don't like writing', 'I don't like to write in French', 'it's hard', 'I know I'll never have to write in French'. As with reading, children varied greatly in their

responses to writing in French. Some clearly saw the value of writing and enjoyed the activity while others struggled for both cognitive and affective reasons. The comments made by individual children would seem to question both the desirability and necessity of an approach based on speaking and listening skills only while at the same time reinforce the importance of a gradual introduction of writing skills.

#### **6.5.7 Homework**

A number of children thought that homework was important in supporting their progress. They thought that they would learn more, that homework teaches them 'things' and that it was 'easy and fun'. One boy thought that homework was 'good for your aggression!' Some children thought that homework was hard, some said they found it hard without help at home and one girl said that homework was sometimes hard when she did not understand 'what was going on in class'. Unsurprisingly, homework was also thought of by some as taking up time that could be better spent doing other things. It would not seem unreasonable to assume that in a context where teaching and learning time are limited those children who recognise the value of homework and 'extra' work might be in a better 'starting' position.

#### **6.5.8 The Things Children Liked Most**

In analysing the responses to the questionnaires it was not always easy to disentangle children's responses in terms of what they said they found easy or difficult and what they said they liked and disliked. Understandably, children

often dislike what they find difficult and like what they find easy. This section will therefore only summarise those comments that were not accommodated under the above headings. One girl, for example, said that she quite liked the 'je and the elle in it all'. This comment might suggest that this girl enjoyed the more 'formal' aspects of learning French. One boy said he liked 'filling in worksheets because they were a revision of what we had learned'. Some children also said they liked 'getting into groups' because we can 'exchange our ideas' and one boy said he liked moving around class. Many said they liked counting and learning the numbers and most, not surprisingly, liked games and puzzles.

#### **6.5.9 The Things Children Liked Least**

Surprisingly, not all children said they liked singing and not all liked drawing, two activities which have generally been assumed as popular amongst young children. One girl stated she did not like 'learning the un's and une's because I didn't know the difference', one said she did not like 'homework because I didn't have a book or tape to help me'. One boy said that he did not like doing things that were 'too hard to understand' and that he felt pressurised and 'got it all wrong'. One said the things he found difficult were the 'bits I had no idea about because I couldn't pronounce them.' One girl simply stated that she did not like French. Some of the above comments seem reminiscent of the comments made by Burstall (1974) that some children wanted to know 'what they were learning and why they were learning it'.

#### **6.5.10 Things They Thought They Had Learned**

When asked to name some of the things they had learned in their French lessons responses displayed a wide variety in what individual children remembered. Responses included 'how to say numbers', 'how to count', 'how to say good morning and hello', 'what is your name', 'say some words and ask some questions', 'say some sentences', 'spelling, speaking, listening, reading and writing in French', 'say our name and age and where we live' and 'ask people questions' as well as 'we have learned how to say things in French'. Individual responses, however, ranged from simple comments such as 'how to count' or 'how old are you' to responses such as 'have a conversation', 'communicate and talk about ourselves', 'learned things about people' and 'what's masculine and feminine'. Some children's experience of having 'learned' French therefore seemed very different from the experience of others. Many said that they had learned numbers and greetings, for example, but few could remember anything close to the language material that had been covered. One boy said that he looked forward to telling his teacher at secondary school what he had learned which, according to what he said on the questionnaire, is 'saying the names of objects in French'. One boy simply stated that he could not remember anything.

#### **6.5.11 Finding out about French-speaking People and Countries where French Is Spoken**

The question what they would like to find out about French-speaking people or countries where French is spoken was included to provide the teacher with

possible topics and themes to cover in future lessons. It elicited a surprising range of responses. One girl, for example, stated 'I would like to know how did some West Indies know how to speak French' while another said that she 'would like to know from French-speaking people how to make learning French easier'. One boy said he wanted to know 'how many languages are spoken in France' and one girl said she would like to know 'how hard they found learning French and if they like their language'. One girl said she wanted to know whether 'French was a hard language to speak and when you learn French do you find it easy to learn another language'. One said he would like to know 'how their lives have changed from the past' and one wanted to know 'how many towns there were in France'. One child wanted to know 'what a French class was like' and one boy said he wanted to know 'why they eat snails'. One girl stated that she would like to know 'almost everything'. These comments quite clearly present a wealth of topics and themes that could be dealt with in a scheme that sets its aim different to the one of developing communicative competence in a particular language and, by implication, adopts a different stance towards issues such as the use of the target language.

#### **6.5.12 Learning French at Secondary School**

This question was included primarily as a double-check on the reliability of other responses to questions on enthusiasm and enjoyment. It was thought that those children who said that they liked and enjoyed learning French would also look forward to learning French at secondary school. Responses to this question revealed a variety of reasons why some children wanted to continue

learning French as well as why some did not. Some children said they looked forward to simply speaking more French 'because French is a lovely language to learn' and some said that they would like to continue learning French because they wanted to speak it 'fluently'. One child wanted to learn 'to pronounce words because I want to learn properly' while another wanted to learn 'how to talk French on the phone because it is very useful'. Some wanted to learn more words because they found words easy while others said they looked forward to more reading or writing. Some children said that they would like to learn more French because when 'I go to France I can speak it' and one boy said he wanted to learn more French because he hopes to 'go there a lot in the future'. One boy said he would like to be able 'to work up a conversation' [sic] and one girl said she wanted to learn 'at least 5 languages'. One girl simply said she hoped to improve and one said she looked forward to 'doing my best because I'm not very good at French'.

Some children, however, also expressed concerns about learning French at secondary school such as being asked questions in French 'because I can't answer them fluently', 'answering questions because I get nervous', 'learning sentences because I find them confusing' and 'getting homework wrong'.

One girl simply stated that she did not want to learn any more French. It would seem important that secondary schools should try and identify possible concerns amongst children as much as find out what they might be able 'to do' (or not do) in the four language skills.

### 6.5.13 Language Choice

Asked whether they wanted to continue with French many said that they did want to do so as French was 'good', 'I can use it when I'm older', 'when I go to France I can speak'. Unsurprisingly, there were a number of children who did not enjoy French and who did not want to learn any more of it. Some children said they wanted to learn a new language as French was 'difficult' or 'hard' or as 'I don't want to learn lots of French words'. Surprisingly, however, there were also those who had said that they had enjoyed the experience but nevertheless did not want to learn any more French because they thought that it was not important to them, because 'it is not important as I do not live in France' or because 'I know I'll never need to use it'. Given a choice, some children amongst those who enjoyed as well as amongst those who did not enjoy learning French said they would choose a different language for a variety of reasons such as holidays, family or friends. One boy said he would like to learn Italian because 'I like the way they pronounce their words' and one said he would like to learn Greek because some of his family 'only spoke Greek'. Another boy said he wanted to learn German because 'it was most complicated'. One girl wanted to learn Spanish because it is 'easy' and because French is 'hard'. One wanted to learn Punjabi because 'I can already understand it and I think I would speak it easily'. Another girl claimed that she just wanted to 'speak another language'. One girl thought that 'sticking to one language often gets boring and a bit of everything is fun'. Some children clearly had some preconceived ideas about 'hard' and 'easy' languages. Their comments highlight the difficulty of extrapolating from learning outcomes in a

specific language and one can once again only speculate what learning outcomes both linguistic and affective might have been had children been learning a different language. The issue of choice of language is a complex one in an English-speaking context. It has already been reported that in the Scottish National Pilot a range of languages, French, German, Spanish and Italian were introduced but children nevertheless focused on one language only. The above comments made by children in combination with earlier discussions on language pairs would strongly suggest that at primary school focus should not be on one language exclusively for both cognitive and affective reasons. Focus on one language has the potential of producing early 'failures' and therefore has the potential of being counterproductive.

## **6.6 Individual Children's Profiles**

It becomes clear from the above comments that there is great variety between individual children's responses to the learning process, their individual strengths and weaknesses and their needs and interests. The profiles of individual children cannot cover every aspect and are therefore not intended as an exact replica of a child. In the interest of accessibility of findings only fourteen children were chosen for profiles. The majority of these children were chosen on the basis of how comprehensive their answers were and on the consistency across the answers they had given. However, the profiles also include children from a range of abilities, high, average and low as defined by their class teachers (not the French teacher) and a couple of profiles are therefore rather 'short'.



## **Rubi**

Rubi is a girl of high ability who says she speaks Hindi and understands Punjabi. She says she finds it hard to pronounce new words and finds French difficult as 'we moved from topic to topic too fast with not enough time to understand'. She says she finds homework hard because she does not always understand what went on in class. Rubi also says she finds sentences 'better' to learn but hard to remember and confusing. Rubi feels that writing is difficult and confuses her. She does not like listening to tapes because she finds them hard to understand. She finds choral repetition easy as it gives her confidence but she finds answering sentences difficult as she gets the words mixed up. She says she does not really like speaking French because 'there is no one at home to speak it to'. Rubi would like to know from French-speaking people how to make learning French 'easier'. She says she enjoyed learning French but that she does not want to learn any more because she thinks it is not important as she does not live in France. Rubi would choose Punjabi 'because I can already understand it and I think I would speak it easily. I don't think you should stick with one language because it often gets boring. A little bit of everything is fun.'

## **Kizianne**

Kizianne is a high ability girl, who speaks English and says she also speaks 'Patois'. She is very enthusiastic about learning French and thinks it is fun, enjoyable and important. Kizianne seems to worry about getting things right and about not getting things done on time. She said she finds pronunciation

easy but does not like speaking in front of the class. She believes herself to be very shy and feels embarrassed when she does not remember something.

Kizianne would have liked to do more reading and writing to improve. She finds the tape recorder difficult and worries about not understanding everything on the tape. She seems very happy with learning French and says she would like to be able to 'talk fluently and understand'. Kizianne is one of the girls who took down notes during lesson time either from the chalk board or on what the teacher said.

### **Zina**

Zina is a high ability girl who speaks English and 'Patois'. She is enthusiastic and enjoys French and would like to go to France. She says she finds speaking French easy and she remembers words easily as they are 'not much different to my own language'. She says she finds pronouncing some numbers difficult as she did not understand the teacher. She does not find reading easy and finds the tape recorder difficult but enjoyable. She also likes games and writing. Zina is happy to learn French 'as it is easier than other languages'. However, she also thinks she is 'not very good' and says that she 'would like to speak French fluently'.

### **Rachel**

Rachel is a high ability girl who speaks English and says she also speaks 'Ghanian'. Rachel says she does not enjoy learning French and that it is hard and difficult. She says she finds it hard to pronounce new words and feels that

French words sound weird. Rachel writes that reading is 'not exactly 'EASY' and that it is 'just as bad with accent'. Writing is 'alright' and has a 'very powerful attraction'. Rachel also likes working with the tape which she finds easy. She finds understanding and listening to the teacher difficult because he 'spoke it pretty fast'. She also says she finds it difficult to remember things. Rachel does not want to learn any more French. She reckons that her 'character is not focused on it' and that she 'just wants to speak another language'. Given a choice she would rather learn Italian but will be learning Spanish and German at secondary school.

### **Corinne**

Corinne is a girl of average ability who speaks English. She thinks French is a brilliant and fascinating language. She is very enthusiastic and thinks she is very good at French although she also says she finds it difficult to remember things. On the questionnaire she states that she has learned how to say 'hello' and 'good-bye' in French. She says she likes writing but does not like drawing things. Corinne would like to speak French fluently and would like to find out from the French whether 'French is a hard language to speak'. Corinne says she wants to learn at least 5 languages but to begin with she will choose French, then 'Germen, Australian, Arabic and Somal on and Spanish etc.'.

### **Rebecca**

Rebecca is a high ability girl with English mother tongue. She thinks it is hard to learn a different language and that she tends to forget things. Rebecca says she finds French difficult because the words are different. She says she finds reading and writing difficult and finds homework hard without any help. She thinks when she is reading in French she never knows what she is reading. She liked learning the numbers as these were quite easy but sentences were difficult because 'I forgot what they meant.' She looks forward to singing at secondary school because she enjoys it but she does not look forward to answering questions because 'I get nervous'. Rebecca thinks that she will never need French and given a choice she would like to learn Dutch because she 'goes there quite a lot'.

### **Ikraam**

Ikraam is identified by her teacher as of 'low ability'. Her first language is Somali and she only managed to respond to two questions on the questionna're. Ikraam said that she found French easy as the teacher 'help you' [sic] and she liked speaking French because 'when a new person comes and they speak French I can speak with them'.

### **Lee**

Lee is a boy of average ability who speaks English. He says he has not enjoyed French and that he finds it hard and boring. He says he finds new words hard to pronounce and to remember. He does not like writing, which he

finds difficult and he prefers reading in English. He thinks French sounds dull. On the questionnaire Lee ticked everything as 'difficult' with the exception of 'saying words'. What he looks forward to least in secondary school is speaking in French 'because I keep forgetting the words'. Lee would like to learn Italian because 'I like the way they pronounce their words'.

### **Martin**

Martin is a boy of high ability who speaks English. He is enthusiastic and enjoys learning French. He thinks it is a good language to know because 'we go there a lot'. Martin likes speaking in French, because it allows him to practise and is good fun. He would have liked to do more reading, writing and homework because 'I could have learned more'. Martin says he did not like doing things that were too hard to understand and that he felt pressurised and 'got it all wrong'. He says that the things he found difficult were 'the bits I had no idea about because I couldn't pronounce them'. Martin would like to continue learning French because he hopes to 'go there a lot in the future'.

### **Matthew**

Matthew is a boy of average ability whose first language is Portuguese. He is very enthusiastic and thinks learning French is fun. He finds writing difficult 'I cannot spell and the letters are confusing' and he does not like reading because he 'does not know how to'. Matthew says he does not like singing because he does not know 'how to sing in French'. He would like to speak French 'completely' and looks forward to 'righting' [sic] at secondary school

because 'it's a new thing'. Matthew would like to learn Greek because 'some of my famely [sic] only speak Greek'.

### **Robert**

Robert is a boy of high ability who speaks English. He says he enjoys French as it is 'different'. He says he finds the words easy as some of them are like English. He does not like homework or writing and says he finds writing difficult. He likes getting into groups because we can 'exchange our ideas'. Robert says that saying things make him feel confident but that 'asking questions of boys and girls (a reference to the use of personal pronouns) is difficult'.

### **Shafik**

Shafik is a boy of average ability who speaks English and Farsi. He says he enjoys French because it is new and fun. He would like to learn more French because when he goes to France he can speak it. He would have liked to do more reading, writing and homework. He liked moving around class and liked the worksheets because 'they were like revision'. He found saying long sentences difficult because 'we had to say some diffacult [sic] words'. Shafik would like to be able 'to work up a conversaion [sic]'. He looks forward to telling his teacher at secondary school what he has learned, (which, according to what he says on the questionnaire, is 'saying the names of objects in French'). Shafik does not know whether he would choose a different language.

## **Jermaine**

Jermaine is a boy of low ability. He says he liked learning French and that it was easy and fun. He also says that he liked the France 98 World Cup best. As it happened, Jermaine had to be moved during most lessons as he kept disrupting the work of others. The World Cup 98 (although it was staged while he was learning French) was never dealt with by the teacher during lessons.

These very different profiles of children suggest the need for very different 'baits' if one were to 'catch them young'. If one were to offer a particular foreign language from a specific age in a school system in which classes are based on chronological ages rather than on stages of development how would one accommodate all these children? How does one cater for the needs and interests of the 'high ability' girl for whom things simply went too fast, who found most things difficult, who thought that French was not important as she does not live there and who would prefer to learn Punjabi or a bit of several languages? The 'high ability' girl who loves French, has no problems with pronunciation as she speaks French Patois but sees herself as shy and would like to do more reading and writing? The 'high ability' girl who managed to do quite well in class but who simply dislikes French and says she does not want to learn it any more as it 'sounds weird' and because her 'character is simply not focused on it'? The 'average ability' girl who was generally quite weak in French but who wants to learn five languages and wants to know why French is 'a hard language to speak'? The 'average ability' boy who finds French dull, boring and difficult and would much rather learn Italian because he 'likes the way they pronounce

the words'? The 'high ability' boy who is enthusiastic about learning French, who goes to France a lot and would like to do more reading, writing and homework? The 'low ability' boy who says he likes French, that it is easy and fun but who kept disrupting others and spent some time outside the classroom? The remainder of this chapter will summarise the findings from the two schools before some tentative conclusions will be drawn.

## **6.7 Summary and Discussion of the Findings from both Schools**

### **6.7.1 Linguistic Considerations**

In both schools children seemed to experience similar problems. Dealing with language at the sentence level, especially, seemed to cause problems in both comprehension and production as did adapting pre-rehearsed language chunks to new situations or to create novel utterances. These findings seem in line with findings from the Scottish National Pilot as reported in Low et al. (1995).

Findings from other studies suggest that many of the problems the young children encountered are also shared with older beginning learners of French such as gender concord or the production of 'mixed chunks' (see Mitchell & Martin, 1997, Myles, Hooper & Mitchell, 1998, for example).

Particular problems seemed to arise in the area of responding to a variety of questions or to a change in questions on personal information such as name and age, for example, although these had been frequently practised in both schools. Much confusion surrounded the manipulation of language from question to answer and vice versa. It is possible that a focus on the third



person singular 'il/elle' might have helped children more in coming to terms with the structural properties of the language. Most early schemes start by introducing the first and second person singular 'je/tu' as it is assumed that children want to talk about themselves. Having to manipulate language between questions and answers from 'je' to 'tu', however, causes considerable problems not only for the young learner. A change from answer to question or from question to answer in the third person singular 'il/elle', however, would require a lesser degree of manipulation from the learner.

Crucially, the pattern of foreign language provision cannot be ignored and one lesson a week only does very little in helping children to remember language material. Perhaps not surprisingly then, given the infrequency of French lessons, children in both schools did not seem to remember language material easily. Lesson observation notes from both schools, interviews and questionnaires indicate that some children found it very hard to remember anything at all and that almost all found it easier to remember words than complete sentences. Extended sessions, possibly on a daily basis, however, are unlikely in the primary school where, given the demands on the curriculum, time is a precious commodity. This would seem to place written language centre stage. The importance of reading and writing skills in remembering, in supporting memory and in learning a foreign language successfully in the classroom has already been discussed previously. If children cannot read or write and if there is no or only limited reading and writing during lessons,

children do not have much to aid their memory which, as was discussed earlier, would appear to be much less effective in younger children.

It is also possible that some children did not remember much because they never really understood in the first place but simply copied and imitated their peers. This is likely to have been the case with some; on occasions when only few children volunteered an appropriate response to a question the number of correct responses increased as the same question was repeated again and again. Nevertheless, the very same children who produced correct answers after several repetitions were the same children who kept asking the observer how to formulate precisely the same questions or answers in later lessons. This suggests that these children might have been interacting 'socially' rather than 'cognitively'. Alternatively, it is possible that some children do not expect a question to change and simply do not listen carefully enough. Listening skills seemed much more problematic in School Two where many children found it hard to concentrate and pay attention to what was going on. Quinn (1997: 68) suggests that in primary schools there is great underachievement in listening skills usually by children who display either 'low self-esteem, limited skills of social interaction or an inability to transfer skills across subjects'. Observations in School Two indicated that all three might have been the case.

Holmes (1978) suggests a number of possible explanations for those instances in the primary school classroom where no response 's forthcoming from the learner:' the child does not know the answer', 'the ch'ld is uncooperative',

'the child has forgotten' or 'the child is simply confused'. A further investigation of these possibilities is not within the remit of this study but would provide scope for further research into the reasons why children fail to answer questions in the foreign language classroom.

Not all children found pronunciation easy and not all children picked up accents easily. Both teachers were near-native models and children were exposed to native-speakers on tape on a regular basis. One group in School Two also had a native-speaker in their class but some children did not acquire anything approaching 'native-speaker' accents. This suggests that some, for whatever reasons, do not just simply pick up accents and intonation patterns but that even young children might benefit from explicit help. A number of questions remain unanswered however. If excellent perceptive abilities, for example, are a prerequisite for achieving accent-free speech, is this why some children just 'pick it up' whereas others struggle? What role do language pairs play? Are native-like standards acquired in a particular second language generally transferable to a third and if so what would be the implications for choice of language or languages at primary school? A question which would seem especially important in the English context where children's future language needs are difficult to predict.

The writer therefore does not doubt that the majority of children had learned something, such as some items of vocabulary or a set of pre-fabricated chunks of language and that some did acquire 'good' accents. The writer also does not

want to question the possibility that with improved methods and with improved patterns of provision, such as a little a day for shorter periods rather than one lengthy lesson a week, children might have learned more. However, one cannot discount the possibility that the same could have been learned, as the literature suggests, at a later stage more efficiently and effectively.

### **6.7.2 Self-concept and Finding French 'Easy'**

Many of the younger children appeared much more confident in their ability to learn French than the older children but it was also stated earlier that the younger children experienced a more 'fun' approach focusing on imitation and reproduction rather than on production. Thinking that learning a foreign language is easy and thinking that one is doing well could be a reflection of such experiences. However, it has already been argued that perceiving something as easy does not necessarily make one good at it. Some of the older children seemed much more realistic in evaluating their 'abilities' and more aware of what is involved in learning a foreign language. They recognised, for example, the importance of reading and writing, of practice and of doing homework.

### **6.7.3 General Learning Difficulties**

A number of general learning difficulties were observed amongst some children in both schools to various degrees such as:

Short concentration spans and inattentiveness

Poor listening skills and poor auditory memory

Poor visual memory

Difficulties with reading, for example difficulties in finding words in a text

Difficulties in writing such as copywriting

Difficulties with numbers

Lack of awareness of time

Sequencing difficulties

Co-ordination problems and problems with body language

Poor rhythmic skills

Social immaturity

All of these are likely to affect progress in learning a foreign language in the classroom. It was beyond the scope of this thesis, however, to identify potential or likely combinations of these factors as well as their degree and the extent to which weaknesses in one area could be compensated for by strengths in another. These learning difficulties would suggest, however, that 'catching them young' would have very different implications for those to be caught.

#### **6.7.4 Natural Characteristics**

Not all children appeared to be spontaneous and uninhibited in the primary classroom and not all children said they liked speaking in French. Nor did they all like singing songs. Not all were prepared to take risks and some quite clearly

worry about making mistakes. While some children are quite spontaneous others think long and hard before they get involved. In a school context, many are aware of the risk of 'taking a risk' and making mistakes and, although children generally do not seem to mind too much, they try hard to avoid making any mistakes and the danger of being laughed at.

In both schools some children seemed embarrassed by direct questions from the teacher and by being put on the spot. Speaking in a second language in a natural acquisition context where one is surrounded by native-speakers of that language cannot easily be equated with speaking in a foreign language in the classroom, surrounded by others who share one's native language. These findings seem to suggest that natural characteristics that might exist in natural language acquisition environments cannot be simply be taken for granted in the foreign language classroom.

Interestingly, a number of children said they preferred it if the teacher 'spoke' in English although it was not established whether this meant 'explained' in English or 'spoke' in English generally. It is possible that, contrary to Krashen's claim that use of the target language lowers the affective filter, maximum use of the target language raises anxiety levels rather than lower these for young children.

### **6.7.5 Affective Considerations**

It became apparent during interviews that enthusiasm is not as widespread as one would have assumed from simply observing children in lessons. While observations seemed to suggest that most children showed a degree of enthusiasm in learning French, it became apparent during interviews and from findings on the questionnaires that there were a number of children who were simply not too sure about the whole experience and who did not seem to enjoy learning French. Children in both schools thus displayed a range of attitudes from the very enthusiastic to the disaffected. However, as was argued earlier, it is difficult to evaluate whether the less 'enthusiastic' children would be more enthusiastic if they were experiencing a different language or a variety of languages. The more 'able' children, as identified by the class teacher, were also not necessarily those with the more positive attitudes. A number of 'high-ability' girls, for example, who did manage relatively well, were not keen to continue with French, simply because they perceived the language as irrelevant. Nor did enthusiasm necessarily relate to children's background. It has already been argued that children's affective responses cannot be separated from their experiences and that enthusiasm might be the result of 'fun' experiences. However, it also seems worth noting that a number of children in School Two quite clearly enjoyed what was a more 'formal' experience of learning French. While some found dealing with genders difficult, for example, others saw this as a challenge they enjoyed.

#### **6.7.6 Enthusiasm Amongst Children Learning French in Year Seven at Secondary School**

On the surface it would appear that the younger children in School One were generally more enthusiastic than the slightly older children in School Two and it was argued that this might well have been the result of their experiences rather than one of age. To clarify this point further the writer decided to investigate whether enthusiasm was indeed largely the result of age or possibly one of experience and whether there were any differences in enthusiasm between those children who had some experience of learning French in the primary school and those who started at eleven. In addition to lesson observations, interviews and questionnaires in the two primary schools a very short and simple 'questionnaire' was therefore administered to 166 children during their first weeks in year 7 at a secondary comprehensive school. These children were from a wide range of over twenty primary feeder schools with experiences ranging from no French to a couple of hours of French per week. They were simply asked if they had learned any French at primary school and what they thought learning French was going to be like. A list of the individual comments made by children can be found in Appendix G.

Out of the 166 children asked 79 said that they had not learned any French at primary school and 53 out of these 79 children commented positively on what they thought learning French was going to be like. They stated, for example, that they thought that French would be 'OK, enjoyable, great and exciting'.



Nineteen thought that French would be 'hard' or a 'challenge'. Only five children thought that learning French would be boring or not much fun and only one boy thought that French was a waste of time as he would not need it.

The 87 children who had done 'some' French at primary school presented a slightly different picture. Comments were on the whole positive although the number of negative comments was greater than in the above group as was the number of those who thought that French was 'hard'. A list can be found in Appendix H. Those children who commented along the lines of 'didn't like it', 'the teacher did not teach us anything', 'not shoor' [sic], 'boring', 'a waste of time', 'rubbish', 'done it for a year and it's rubbish', are at best disaffected and at worst alienated, possibly because they were ill-equipped to make sense of the experience in the first place. For those children the early start might well have been counterproductive. Brumfit states that two surveys of the age factor in language acquisition (Harley, 1986 and Singleton, 1989) while not in theoretical agreement on what exactly the advantages of an early start might be, nevertheless suggest that an early start 'certainly need not do any harm' (Brumfit, 1991). The comments made by some of the children would seem to question such an assumption.

It has already been stated that one would expect a degree of enthusiasm amongst younger children as it would seem natural that they should respond positively to a novel experience. However, these comments also suggest that

the enthusiasm for foreign language learning and 'something new' is still present at the age of 11 or 12. They also suggest that enthusiasm might well be a question of learning experiences such as games and play activities, rather than one of age. In any case, as has already been argued in previous chapters, while enthusiasm might be an important ingredient in the learning process, especially amongst young children who cannot easily conceptualise long-term goals, enthusiasm alone gives little indication of ultimate levels of success. Nor does it follow that 'younger is better' for learning a foreign language as such because children are more 'enthusiastic'.

The remaining pages of this thesis will draw a conclusion based on the investigation of the literature on age in second language learning discussed in Chapter Two, the examination of two large-scale empirical studies, the Pilot Scheme and the Scottish National Pilot discussed in Chapter Three, the theoretical considerations in Chapter Four and the two case studies that formed the focus of Chapters Five and Six.

## CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine the beliefs about learning a foreign language at primary school and to investigate whether 'younger is better', particularly in the context of the British primary school. An extensive investigation of the literature on age in language learning in Chapter Two suggested that 'younger' in the sense of 'pre-puberty' might be better for the assimilation of native-like accents and intonation in a second language. Studies on the age factor in second language development suggested that in the area of morphological, syntactical, lexical and discourse development, however, older generally means faster although in natural contexts, younger children are likely to overtake eventually. In the classroom, however, foreign language learning is likely to depend on a complex interplay between a host of factors, biological, cognitive, affective and environmental and the 'age' at which foreign language learning begins would require careful consideration of the time when learning is likely to be most effective and the time when learning is likely to become difficult or impossible. Considerations when foreign language 'learning' should start would thus depend on aims and objectives. If one were to introduce a foreign language into the primary school curriculum for phonological reasons only, for example, a number of considerations would seem important. Research discussed earlier suggests that native-like accents can still be achieved if children start learning at the age of ten. Just how long it takes to establish native-like levels of pronunciation in the classroom and the exact role of language pairs, for example, is still open to question but if native-like accents could be achieved possibly in one or two years, what is the justification for starting from a very young age?

The importance of 'native-like' accents for the child in Britain learning a foreign language would also seem questionable. Authentic accents are, as Hill (1970) argued, 'culture-bound' and important in assessing membership of a particular speech community but societies vary with respect to their sensitivity to accent. While it would seem important for the child to understand and master the morphological and semantic distinctions realised by phonology and while it is important to understand and make oneself understood, how important is it for the child to sound like a native-speaker? While one can disagree on the answer to this question, any justification of an early start which is solely based on children achieving native-like standards of pronunciation becomes at least questionable and particularly so in a context where future language needs are difficult to predict from an early age. If, however, one were to justify an early start for phonological reasons only, the importance of the teacher as a role model cannot be overstated. If most children acquire native-like standards of pronunciation fairly effortlessly then, by implication, they also acquire 'flawed' pronunciation and intonation effortlessly from their less 'qualified' teachers and these 'flaws' might be difficult to shake off at a later stage.

Outcomes from early foreign language learning projects in British primary schools do not seem to provide convincing evidence that an early start in a foreign language necessarily leads to better outcomes or improved 'ultimate attainment'. Outcomes from early foreign language projects appear limited and seem to be of a psychological nature, such as higher levels of motivation, rather than of a linguistic one. The possibility that similar linguistic outcomes could

have been achieved more efficiently and effectively at a later stage cannot be dismissed and finds strong support from the literature on age in second language development, especially in writing concerned with the learning of a foreign language in the classroom rather than the acquisition of a second language in natural contexts. The possibility that psychological gains could be the result of methods and policies of 'languages for all' rather than the result of an early start as such can also not be dismissed. Initial 'gains' are, in any case, not necessarily long-lasting. Studies discussed in Chapter Three suggest that starting early simply because it provides the learner with more time does not necessarily lead to better results, especially if learning is not continued beyond the initial years. That quality of learning time would have to be balanced with quantity of learning time has already been emphasised.

The two small-scale case studies in this thesis cannot match projects on a national level. Nevertheless, the limited and tentative findings from classroom observations, from questionnaires and from interviews with children further challenge the assumption that 'younger is better' for all children in all contexts. Classroom observations suggested that many children did not, for example, generally find the learning of a foreign language easy and some simply appeared confused by the experience. Remembering language material seemed to pose special problems for many, perhaps not surprisingly given the artificial nature of learning a foreign language within the quantitative and qualitative constraints of the primary school classroom. Although a number of studies suggest that young children tend to 'pick up' accents and intonation

easily, this was not the case with all children. Some did but others seemed to struggle and might therefore have to be consciously taught.

Lesson observations, questionnaires and interviews carried out in the two primary schools suggest considerable differences both cognitive and affective between individual children. It is nothing new to state that children of the same age can vary considerably in their cognitive and affective development, however, the relevance of the concept of a specific 'age' in foreign language learning remains questionable and if one were to 'catch them young' one might well have to catch them with different 'baits'. Some children are cognitively more mature, they are literate, they have some awareness of how language works, they are responsible in their classroom behaviour, they have adequate personal and social skills, they are enthusiastic and display positive attitudes and they have parental support. Others clearly lack even the most basic skills, they find it hard to concentrate or focus and their personal and social immaturity is likely to prevent them from gaining much from the experience. Younger did not necessarily seem to be better for affective reasons either and while some children appeared very enthusiastic, others displayed poor attitudes, were at best disaffected and at worst alienated. Some children might therefore appear more 'ready' for some foreign language work. However, as yet, there is little evidence to support the notion that there is a definite connection between 'age' alone and the levels of proficiency a learner achieves and that those who start learning a foreign language 'early' do better than those who start 'later'.

The children questioned in their first year at secondary school seemed to express as much enthusiasm for learning a foreign language as did the younger ones. However, a number of children who had experienced a foreign language at primary school expressed negative attitudes and thought that language learning was a 'waste of time'. These unintended consequences of an early start cannot be ignored and avoiding failure would seem to be preferable to dealing with its consequences.

The validity of the aim of developing communicative competence in a particular language, of language 'learning' rather than language 'sensibilisation' thus remains questionable and would seem to reflect a confusion between the ultimate aim and the means, for while the ultimate aim might well be 'communicative competence' in a particular language, making children walk before they can stand would seem to be a futile exercise.

If profitless experiences are to be avoided, the logic of the situation would seem to demand that 'learning how to learn', 'education through a foreign language' rather than 'learning a foreign language' should be the major concern of any programme. 'Foreign language education' in the primary school could be seen as an opportunity to do a number of things, for example to help children towards increasing their awareness of language and to arouse their curiosity about languages, to provide them with fundamental, generic and transferable learning skills, to foster positive attitudes towards different cultures and speakers of other languages, to develop their thinking skills and to develop personal and

social skills. The specific circumstances of the English-speaking context could be regarded as an opportunity rather than as a problem.

Children who have 'learned' French at primary school will inevitably arrive at secondary school with an attitude towards French (and possibly an attitude towards all foreign language learning) and with a concept of themselves as language 'learners'. Establishing and maintaining positive dispositions about foreign language learning would thus seem to be crucial. There are thousands of primary schools in a huge variety of geographical locations, with a wide range of cultures, interests and needs. A programme of language education at primary school which has its own merits and from which all children will benefit whatever their background and whatever language they might study at secondary school, would suggest itself as the way forward. Knowing 'how' rather than knowing 'what' is likely to result in more positive experiences and in less confusion and frustration at a later stage.



## **APPENDICES**

## **APPENDIX A**

### **Lesson Observations - School One**

**Class: Year Four (28 pupils, 11 girls, 17 boys)**

#### **Lesson One**

Teacher asks class: 'Qu'est-ce que tu aimes?' with flashcards on sports.

Class seems very attentive and plenty of hands go up.

They are supposed to use whole sentences, e.g. J'aime... but generally answer with single item of vocabulary only e.g. 'basket', 'volley' or 'ski'.

Genders are generally not used.

Teacher involves children at the front of class, they can choose a flashcard.

One boy keeps asking boys, teacher suggests that he should ask some girls.

He shows the 'swimming' flashcard. Nobody seems to remember the word for swimming. Teacher suggests that they should have a guess: 'it doesn't matter if you're wrong'.

Some hands go up and some sports are guessed, somebody offers 'natation' without gender.

Teacher uses lots of praise in both English and French, e.g. très bien.

Most children seem to have their hand up at some stage and boys take part as much as girls.

Teacher moves on to a tape activity which is explained in English. Pupils are meant to listen and tick boxes of what people like on worksheet. Walk around class and notice some confusion despite teacher having explained in English what they need to do. There's lots of rubbing out and children obviously want to get things right. Seems some did not understand what they were supposed to do, e.g. what to tick and what not to tick.

One boy gets out of his seat and comes up to me and asks for help.

They should recognise the words on the tape as they have been practised a lot with the flashcards.

Teacher goes on to checking answers and to her question: 'Who thinks they've got them all right?' one girl replies: 'I don't think, I know.' So much for confidence!

Some children have their hand up before teacher asks a question. Shows that they're confident but also means that they do not necessarily listen to the question and might go by body language and just guess.

The class is still attentive after a long time of listening.

Somebody makes a mistake, class laugh. Teacher reprimands: 'It is not funny to laugh at somebody else's mistake. We all make mistakes.' This seems to have restored confidence of the child who made the mistake, looking at his face.

## Lesson Two

Teacher practices: 'Qu'est-ce que tu aimes?' with flashcards.

Plenty of hands go up. This week some start to get a full sentence right, e.g.

'J'aime... Pronunciation is weak amongst some, something like 'Chai' or 'Tschai' keeps coming up but is accepted and not corrected. Some still don't remember the genders.

Teacher starts to call on individual children with a child's name first and only few hands go up. Teacher uses lots of praise. Teacher talks in English about the Olympic Games and the significance of the five rings.

Pupils go on to practising numbers in preparation for tape. Teacher explains in English what they need to do. Pupils listen to tape and record numbers. A couple of boys seem confused about what is going although teacher has explained several times. One boy is struggling with writing the numbers which he does in an odd way. Not all recognise numbers given on tape.

Suggest game might be good idea to consolidate numbers. Class finishes with a number game on board and everybody is involved. Some still don't remember numbers, recognise or recall.

## Lesson Three

Not many notes taken during this lesson as this was a practical lesson with lots of colouring in and cutting out. Children cut out pictures of famous sports people from magazines and were asked to write some French to go with the pictures. Most spent the lesson simply cutting out pictures. Some only put

names with these but a group of children of mixed ability had a go at writing some sentences on personal information, name and age. Most were struggling with this, nobody could write from memory which is no surprise as they had not seen much written language. So far no reading beyond isolated words or isolated sentences. Some had problems copying correctly from the board. Letters or words missed out were pointed out to them but a couple of children only recognised missed out language items after these were pointed out several times. Some have a funny way of writing, they ignore margins or lines and some cut off in mid word and start a new line. Do they know what they are copying?

While children were 'busy' walked around class to revise some basic language and asked some children questions such as 'comment t'appelles-tu?', 'quel âge as-tu?' 'où habites-tu?', 'qu'est-ce que tu aimes?'

A number of them could not remember any answers or ask somebody else.

'Comment je m'appelle..' was produced on a couple of occasions as a response.

Some were still struggling with basic numbers. Some produced 'j'ai huit' or 'j'ai neuf' and left out 'ans'. Confusion over questions, 'Quel âge as-tu?' , for example, is answered with 'J' habite...' They seem to give me any old answer to a question.

What sounds like 'J'ai habite' is said several times.

#### Lesson Four

This is a lesson around games, particularly number games with throwing a ball and most of what happens is in English apart from short instructions such as 'écoutez', 'regardez' etc.

Involved in the games so not taking many notes. There is much fun and excitement and all are involved. Very little focus however on 'accurate' use of French. Some still struggle with basic numbers.

## Lesson Five

Teacher introduces mon sport préféré and models: 'J'aime le basket mais mon sport préféré c'est la natation'.

Pupils are asked to translate this into English

Teacher then revises: 'Qu'est-ce que tu aimes?'

Lots of hands go up but children use single items of vocab again.

Teacher explains that they are meant to answer in full sentences: 'J'aime...'

Some produce a full sentence but pronunciation is sometimes weak again.

Again not corrected.

Teacher moves on to preferred sports and asks: 'Ton sport préféré ...?'

Child answers: 'Le tennis'

Pupil opposite asks: 'What does 'préfééré' mean?'

Teacher uses flashcard to model whole sentence: 'Mon sport préféré c'est...'

Teacher says: 'if you can say the lot have a go, if not try the rest, I find it difficult as well.'

Some confusion here about what exactly they are supposed to say. Most children now can say 'mon sport préféré c'est...' but many pronounce the 't' in 'sport'. They still say 'le natation' after several weeks of practice.

Pupils go on to do worksheet. Teacher: 'Complète c'est quoi?' , 'It's almost the same in English'. Child volunteers: 'complete'.

Pupils complete sheet in speaking then in writing, they write in the missing sports.

Walk round and check their work and point out spelling mistakes to a girl. She corrects mistakes and comes up to me with correct version. Obviously wants to do well and possibly please the teachers.

Teacher checks work and asks for 'toute la phrase'.

Pupils do not seem to understand.

They don't see that they are supposed to answer with the whole sentence and not just the sport they filled in. Teacher explains in English. Whole sentences are now read but some are thrown by pronunciation even of words they got right previously

## Lesson Six

Revision of 'Comment t'appelles-tu' and 'Quel âge as-tu?'

Pupil asks me 'Miss, what do I have to say?' in response to teachers question 'comment t'appelles-tu?'. Does not remember how to tell somebody her name. She is eager to please but not so interested in the answer itself as she asks the same question a few moments later.

One pupil produces: 'Comment je m'appelle...'

Teacher in English: 'What am I asking you, for those who have forgotten when I say "Quel âge as-tu"?''

None of the pupils can answer this question. This is after almost a year of learning French.

Teacher explains again and practices questions and answers.

Children keep saying: 'J'ai neuf' missing out 'ans'.

Teacher says: 'Say the whole phrase' and puts 'ans' on chalkboard.

Teacher then writes whole phrase on board with a gap for the age and pupils are asked to use the phrase and fill gap but with a range of numbers teacher writes on the board.

We revise the numbers again.

There are plenty of hands up now but a lot of 'Chei' for 'J'ai...' which teacher does not pick up on.

Teacher: 'Ecris les nombres' and plays cassette.

Two girls tell me that they have forgotten their numbers. Again!

Some pupils want their answers ticked.

They now do some writing. Teacher tells them to get exercise books out.

Instructions are: 'écrivez la date', the heading is: 'les jours'.

Some of them do not seem to understand, some are so slow that the whole process takes about 5 minutes.

Teacher writes part of a word of a day and pupils complete, e.g. 'mercre...' pupils put 'di'. Days have obviously been taught previously.

Many have problems with spelling.

Class goes on to do pair work.

Pupils write seven days of the week and a sport against each. They are meant to ask each other 'Qu'est-ce que tu fais le...' and answer 'Je joue...'

Assume this has been taught before my arrival. Pupils end up saying: 'lundi?' and answering: 'le basket'. They do not use whole sentences or structures.

Work with a pair and ask one child 'Comment t'appelles tu?' The response is a blank stare, the child cannot answer.

## Lesson Seven

Teacher tells pupils in English to listen and watch.

Teacher tells them not to worry if they were not here last week and that they will catch up.

Topic of 'drinks' was introduced previous week (which was missed).

Teacher uses flashcards and asks: 'Qu'est-ce que c'est?'

Some remember the drinks, especially 'coca' and 'café' but genders are generally not remembered

Teacher recycles 'Qu'est-ce que tu aimes?'

Genders are not remembered and children mix un/une or le/la randomly.

Teacher asks for the date in French

A girl asks how to say the date in French (they have been doing the dates every week) Tell her but she says that she does not want to speak in front of the class. Starts to 'hide' behind other people.

Teacher moves on to cassette work and explains in English what they need to do. 5 drinks are mentioned and pupils tick these. This is a very easy activity all they have to do is recognise words, some of them cognates, café, coca, orangina, so most can do this.

Teacher checks answers and explains why some words have accents.

Second listening: children are supposed to work out what French speakers say for 'I would like...'

Nobody picks up 'Je voudrais'...

Teacher models this and moves on to: 'Qu'est-ce que tu veux?'

Children are to answer 'je voudrais' plus a drink. Some remember some of the drinks but not the genders which they either leave out or get wrong.

## Lesson Eight

Revision based on: 'Qu'est-ce que tu aimes?' and 'J'aime...'

Plenty of hands up, answers on the whole correct but single words only.

Pronunciation is weak, e.g. 'Tschaime'

Teacher moves on to listening activity/worksheet 'La liste des boissons'

On the tape waiter: 'Qu'est-ce que tu veux?'

Customer: 'Je voudrais...'

Pupils write down in French or English or draw what is being ordered.

Plenty need help and some simply copy a number of drinks from the menu on the worksheet regardless of what is said on the tape.

Second listening, pupils fill in prices of drinks but not many get this right, they don't recognise the numbers.

Teacher: 'Some of you panic, don't, it doesn't matter if you don't understand first time'.

Some do not understand second time.

Teacher moves on to group work and asks pupils to get into groups of 4. This seems to take a long time.

One pupil is the waiter the other three order an item of drink.

Join one group. The 'waiter' does not say anything. Supposed to say 'Qu'est-ce que tu veux?'

Those that order use simple items of vocabulary without genders. None in the group use 'je voudrais'. Some manage to remember to say please and thank you.

Most groups are happy to present their group's 'work' at the end of the lesson and do a little role play in front of the class. Those that do not get a chance seem disappointed. Much enthusiasm but little correct use of French beyond single items of vocab 'coca' or 'café' or 'orangina'.



**APPENDIX B**  
**Semi- structured Interviews**  
**Class: Year 4**

Tell me a little about learning French

Tell me something you like

Tell me something you don't like so much

What do you like best

What do you like least

What sort of things do you find easy

What do you find difficult

What is good fun

What do you find boring

Do you mind making a mistake

Do you think you're doing well

Why do you think so

Do your parents help you

Would you have liked to learn a different language

Anything else you would like to tell me

## **APPENDIX C**

### **Tape-recordings in School One**

**Sareet**

S: Hello

BP: What we'll do, we'll talk about your French a little bit and how you, you know how you feel about it

S: Ok so you're gonna ask me questions and I'll answer

T: You tell me about it. I don't want to ask you many questions really

S: Ok say that again, what we're gonna do xx.

BP: Just

S: xx

BP: Just, just tell me the things you like and the things you don't like so much

S: Shall I start now?

BP: MMh

S: Ok, my favourite subjects are French, French is especially my favourite subject, and my favourite teacher in this school, my 3 best teachers in this school no my best four best teachers in this school are Mrs Whitfield, Mrs Mills, Mrs Fielding and Mrs Poole

BP: And what do you like about French tell me something that you really like about French

S: French is a different language like it's got loads of apostrophes and things and I would like to learn different languages and I learn this other language you know when you go to Malaysia they talk Malai and I can speak I can say my numbers up to about three

BP: Really

S: And xx I learn numbers and things my mum and dad teach me my mum was born in Malaysia my dad was born in Singapur

BP: Tell me something you don't like so much in French - what do you find difficult

S: Nothing really

BP: Do you like it all

S: Yeah

BP: Right, what do you find really easy

S: MMh

BP: Reading, listening, speaking, writing

S: Ok I like it when Miss asks me questions and we have to answer them like she tells us to pick like you know she has cards of the things, the sports and the drinks she gets

them and she lets you choose and then she picks an orange you don't know she's covering it and you have to guess what you think it is and when you guessed it right you get, mmh you get to like choose it and I like it when you have to answer questions like she looks at them, she quickly picks one up and asks you, she quickly takes them out as fast as she can she doesn't go like xx she goes like that she picks it and then she puts it back in.

BP: You find that good fun

S: Yeah and I like it when we play games. Like we played the xx ball and I got two numbers

BP: Right, do you think you're doing well in French

S: Yes

BP: Why do you think so

S: Because last time I used to speak French I couldn't say my days right, I could say, I said all the days except for samedi and dimanche but the rest I got them and I, like they they weren't in the right order and they were all muddled up and I couldn't say drinks or anything because in my old school I used to learn French and like after school I had French classes and my French teacher she left and for a certain amount of time when I came to this school then she came back to do French again so.. we then when I left I couldn't do anymore French except for when I first started this school again.

BP: Right, now what's your name again, Comment t'appelles-tu

S: Je m'appelle Sareet

BP: Sareet, S, a...

S: R e e t, can you...not there's not an 'h', can you ask Miss if we can go through the alphabet again, the whole class go through the alphabet

BP: I'll let her know, Ok many thanks, I think you did really well

### **Donna**

BP: We're going to talk a little bit about the French Ok, just tell me the things you like and the things you don't like so much

D: Sports I like the natation and the ski

BP: No you don't have to speak in French you can just tell me in English

D: I like to say it in French

BP: OK

D: I like natation and le ski

BP: Qu'est ce que tu aimes... la natation

D: Et le ski

BP: Mmh

BP: Tu aimes le basket

D: Tu aimes le basket, tu aimes le volley

BP: Well done, tell me the sorts of things you find easy in French, what do you, what can you do easily, what do you find difficult...speaking, listening, reading

D: On the tape it says some other French person I don't know

BP: Do you find it difficult listening to the tape

D: Yeah

BP: You prefer it if the teacher speaks do you

D: Yeah, on the tape it's more confusing

BP: What else do you like, or what else do you find difficult

D: Mmh

BP: What do you like best, best of all

D: XX natation

BP: And what about learning French what do you like best in the French lesson

D: Writing

BP: Really you like that best do you and what do you like least

D: Pardon

BP: What do you like least, what do you like not so much in the French lesson

D: On the tape when it says a sport and when it says the cycling then I don't know that that's the hardest one

BP: Alright, do you think you're doing well

D: Yeah

BP: Yeah, yhat makes you think so

D: I don't know I just feel comfortable

BP: You're happy with it...do your parents help you in the home with French

D: Yeah

BP: Who helps you

D: My mum

BP: What do you do

D: She tells me some French numbers and I say them to her

BP: Really, nice, do you speak any other languages, what do you speak at home, English

D: English

BP: English... OK whose going to come after you Donna, who was number three

D: Stacey

BP: Stacey, can you get Stacey for me please

D: What's that for

BP: It's what Miss...

### **Stacey**

BP:... the things you want to tell me about the French, the things you like or the things you don't like so much

S: I like doing the sheets

BP: The worksheets

S: But it's hard on the tape when you have to listen to the numbers it is so different

BP: What else do you like

S: I like xx I like when we get in groups of 2 or 3 I like showing the clock but sometimes I feel that's embarrassing

BP: When you laugh or when others laugh

S: Most of the time you laugh

BP: You laugh yourself

BP: So what else do you like, what's good fun

S: I like doing xx in twos or threes or fours xx and some things in the cafe

BP: You do like role plays

S: Yeah

BP: Something you don't like so much

S: I dont know really, I dont like when ...I don't like the sheet when we had to number it down it was like really hard for me

BP: Was that with the tape

S: Yeah

BP: XX hard listenig to the tape

S: Yeah

BP: Do your parents help you in the home with French

S: No, but there is this French girl who came called Caroline... she's coming to stay for two and a half weeks it's her third day with us it's really a problem with her when we want to leave home at eight to go to school she wanted just 5 minutes my dad wants to go straight away

BP: Eight o'clock dead on, so what do you do next time you say to her five to eight and then eight o'clock she will be ready

S: Yeah that's when we have to be ready. He was like really mad my dad said I can't put up with this girl

BP: Do you think your doing well in French

S: It's alright

BP: It's alright, only alright or very alright

S: Alright

BP: What makes you say that

S: Because I don't know the hard bits sometime. I keep xx forgetting

BP: The two words for them, remember the one for orange now

S: Orangina

BP: And the other one for orange juice

S: I don't remember that one

BP: Jus...

S: Jus d'orange

BP: And mineral water... eau

S: Minerale

BP: See you do remember, some are bit more difficult and others are a lot easier like coca it's easy to remember

S: Yeah and café

BP: Café exactly, anything else you'd like to tell me, about the French, you like it

S: Yeah

BP: Yeah, ok now you are ... Comment t'appelles-tu

S: Yeah

BP: Je m'appelle...

S: Stacey

### **Vakeesan**

BP: We are just going to talk about the French a little bit you... tell me what you like about it, something you really like about it

V: XX coca, XX coca

BP: Un coca, and what do you like about learning French what things do you like

V: Playing

BP: Playing

V: Yeah  
BP: What else do you like in the French lesson  
BP: Do you like reading... no not XX  
V: Reading  
BP: You know, what you like to do in the French lesson, do you like reading or writing or speaking, what do you like best  
V: Speaking  
BP: You like speaking best  
V: Yeah  
BP: Right ...and what do you like not so much, what do you find difficult, reading, writing, listening to the tape reorder  
V: Listening to the tape recorder  
BP: Is that difficult  
V: Yeah  
BP: Yeah, do you speak any other languages  
V: Tamil  
BP: Tamil  
V: Yeah, Tamil and French  
BP: What do you speak at home  
BP: French as well  
V: We speak Tamil  
BP: Tamil  
V: Yes  
BP: Do your parents help you with the French  
V: My sister speaks French my sister help me  
BP: She helps you  
V: Yeah  
BP: Do you find it easy French or do you find it difficult  
V: Difficult  
BP: Difficult  
V: Yeah  
BP: More difficult than English  
V: Yeah  
BP: Yeah, why is that  
V: Very difficult

BP: Very difficult

V: Yes

BP: Would you like to learn a different language or would you not like to learn you know, French

V: I like Tamil, I don't like ... I don't like

BP: French

V: I like French... me no understand French

BP: No? Nothing or just a little bit

V: Nothing

BP: Nothing

V: Yeah

BP: When the teacher speaks in French you don't understand it

V: No

BP: No

V: No

BP: When you read something

V: I read no, not something, not something

BP: Nothing

V: Yeah

BP: Can you say something to me in French

V: Hello

BP: Comment t'appelles tu

V:...

BP: What am I asking you

V: Asking...

BP: If you don't know it ... say you don't know

V: Yeah

BP: You don't know

V: Yeah

BP: You find it difficult

V: I do know, yeah

BP: You do know

V: Yeah

BP: What am I asking you when I say comment t'appelles-tu

V: I don't know



BP: You don't know

V: Yeah, I don't know

BP: Don't worry, don't worry, not everybody finds it easy some people find it easy some find it more difficult, OK...Do you think it's good fun

V: Fun

BP: Learning French, is it fun or is it, do you worry about it

V: Fun

BP: Fun, you like it

V: Yeah

BP: You find it difficult but you like it

V: Yeah, difficult I don't like, I, I like French, I like

BP: You like...but difficult

V: Yeah

BP: OK

### **Nicholas**

BP: Tell me a little bit about it... what things you like or what you like best what you don't like so much, anything you want to say really

N: I like sports

BP: French we're talking about... what do you like in French, in the French lesson

N: Doing about numbers and different sports XX and and xx sometimes when I'm doing sheets

BP: You like doing sheets

N: Yes and listening to the tape

BP: You like listening to the tape

N: Yes and getting some of the things written down XX

BP: Why do you like listening to the tape why do you find that good

N: Well it's a bit funny sometimes and I like the music on it when it always comes on that's it really

BP: That's good and why do you like writing things down

N: Well, because if I get the spellings wrong I can ask Miss for help or you and I like writing things, it's funny but I just like writing French

BP: That's good, it's good, it's good if you do like it, what about reading do you like reading it

N: Yeah

BP: Yeah

N: If I can understand it

BP: And do you understand it most of the time

N: Most of the time yeah

BP: What about speaking in front of the class, do you like that

N: Yeas, when we played that game on sports I enjoyed that

BP: Good fun... do you think you're doing well in French

N: Yeah

BP: What makes you say that

N: Well, the first bit the first time we had French it was a little bit hard for me but as I got on in French I got more things right and enjoyed it more

BP: When you get things right you enjoy it more, do you

N: Yeah, because then I don't have to go back and do it again

BP: Do it again... Do you speak any other languages Nicholas

N: I know a bit of German and Italian

BP: What do you speak at home

N: English

BP: English, does your mum or dad help you with French

N: Sometimes yes I've got a book with French words and it helps me xx so also my brother helps me as well because he does he knows French as well

BP: Right, so that is useful isn't it if he can help you, so all in all you like it

N: Yeah

BP: Yeah, right, many thanks

## **David**

BP: We're just going to talk about the French a little bit, the things you like, the things you don't like so much, anything you want to tell me really, tell me something you like about it

D: I like experimenting with the new words and trying to pronounce them and the activities like when we had to act things out, I liked that and ...

BP: What do you like most speaking, listening, reading, writing

D: I like speaking French most

B: Why is that

D: I think cause it's quite exciting cause it's a new language, and if you're reading it you're not showing everyone you know it but if you speak it you're showing everyone how good you are at French and ...

BP: Do you think you're ...sorry go on

D: Basically that's what I quite like about French

BP: Do you think you're good at it

D: Quite good yeah

BP: What makes you think that

D: I can, I'm starting to understand practical terms when Miss asks the questions and on the top of the sheet I'm beginning to learn how what they are from the English words they are quite similar sometimes when you read them

BP: Right, they look the same don't they and you can guess what they mean

D: Yes and from the pictures

BP: What about something you don't like so much or do you like everything

D: I don't so much like reading and writing French because I find that a bit boring

BP: Do you? What both reading and writing or

D: I like reading French a bit better than writing French because it's quite hard because you've got to learn xx like the es and the as and where to put the question marks and apostrophes

BP: It's quite difficult to remember all that isn't it

D: Mmh

BP: Do you speak any other languages

D: I can speak a bit of Korean, no not Korean, Cantonese

BP: Really

D: And Mandarin

BP: How did you learn that

D: When I went to Hong Kong and my uncle's girlfriend is Chinese and when we went to a restaurant she just taught me

BP: You learned some there how nice, do you like learning French

D: Yeah, it's fun

BP: Good fun, what makes it fun

D: It's like a challenge and a new task

BP: Would you have liked to learn another language or is French fine

D: French is good so I think I would like to carry on cause I think we're planning on going over a skiing holiday to France, when I was little we went to le Touquet, the

beach and we stayed there and I liked to learn some more French so I can actually speak

BP: Great, do your mum and dad help you

D: XX book of like park, restaurants at home which is useful you've got to say what it is in France pull this lever and then see if you're right

BP: That sounds like good fun

D: Yeah

BP: Right, anything else you would like to tell me

D: Not really

BP: You're just happy with it, are you

D: Yeah

BP: Great, comment t'appelles tu

D: Mmh

BP: Je m'appelle...

D: David

BP: David, OK, Merci David, well done

### **Gary**

BP: Just tell me something, just tell me anything about French...what you like...what you don't like, if you find it easy or difficult

G: I find the French really easy, I like speaking it a lot but I'm not so keen on XX because I'm afraid I might get the spellings wrong

BP: Right, the spelling worries you does it

G: Spelling worries me...sort of a little bit

Sometimes when I'm begging to ask, answer a question but when the teacher asks me I get a bit nervous about what I'm going to say I sort of forget XX particularly in a group thing the French XX so I try to be a bit XX

BP: Put a bit of fun into it

G: Yeah, make it a bit longer so the time goes by quickly and the break comes, when we had to stand up in your group and do and speak French like the waiter when we did XX I really do enjoy it

BP: The role play

G: Yeah, I really do like saying it when we had to write it down we weren't so sure what to put

BP: Right

G: Oh yeah and then when we do another subject I get a bit nervous what it's going to be like counting up to 100 and do the numbers and or doing the sports we haven't learnt all of them I don't think cause we don't know what snooker is or pool ... we know le basket and XX natation le ski and all them all the easy ones but we don't know the real hard ones, when we started French I was a bit worried of what we were going to do but I was quite confident because I because my brother taught me a lot of French for he was doing it, again in year 2 when I was in year 2 our teacher Miss XX she taught French to year 5 if we were last into lunch we we stay a bit and hear a bit of their French of what they say and I'm a bit nervous of what French are we going to be learning in year 5 what type of new topics we are going to be doing in French, what kind of teacher we are going to get for French XX

BP: But you're looking forward to it really aren't you

G: Yeah

BP: Right, anything else you want to say

G: Not really

BP: Do you speak any other languages

G: I can count up to 4 in German

BP: Go on then

G: Eins, Zwei, XX

BP: Eins, zwei, drei, vier, well done

G: My grandad told me how to say good morning but I forgotten it in Portuguese my grandad's going to start is going to try and teach me how to count up to five or ten in Arabic so I can learn of of by heart so those are the languages I can speak

BP: Quite a few isn't it

G: Oh yeah and I can speak XX American language

BP: Do you ... go on

G: I think they change a lot of things in America and in Portuguese and Arabic but in German you can when you learn German you get a bit of a clue because most of the words have something to do with English in French they say le basket which give XX clue

BP: Great, do you parents help you with the French

G: My mum knows quite a bit of French but not a lot, we've got a French dictionary at home

BP: That's useful isn't it you can check up words if you want to find out something

G: Yeah, my brother is doing a lot of French XX there's a lot of people in my family who can speak a lot of French, my gran used to, my granpa knew a lot but his memory is gone my mum knows a lot and so does my dad and my brother

BP: So you can get lots of help from everybody, great, OK, we better stop it now because it's your lunch

### **Kunigoshi**

BP: Which languages do you speak

K: A little bit of Korean, Japanese, English

BP: Do you like French

K: Yeah

BP: Tell me what you like about it

K: I like the drinks

BP: The drinks, what else do you like, do you like speaking best or listening or reading

K: Reading

BP: Why do you like reading best

K: Because it's fun

BP: It's fun, what makes it fun

K: It has some fun things in it like sometimes somebody says jokes in it, I like the jokes and sometimes mazes and something like that so I like reading

BP: It's good fun

K: Yeah

BP: And what do you like not so much

K: I don't like writing that much

BP: Why do you not like writing

K: Because if you write for a long time your hands get tired

BP: Is that in English or in French or both

K: Both

BP: Both

BP: So what do you like best of all in the French lesson

K: I like reading and saying out things when the teacher asks me questions I like sometimes to answer

BP: You like doing that

K: Yeah

BP: You like speaking in class

K: Yeah  
BP: Do you mind if you make a mistake  
K: Not that much  
BP: Not that much, no, you still put your hand up  
K: Yes, sometimes  
BP: Why only sometimes  
K: Because I don't know some things sometimes  
BP: And if you don't know you don't put your hand up  
K: Yes, I don't put my hand up if I don't know  
BP: Good, anything else you want to tell me  
K: I don't have anything else  
BP: No? But you like French do you  
K: Yeah  
BP: Are you looking forward to next year  
K: Yes but I might change school before I go to year 5  
BP: Why do you think that is  
K: Because I'm changing house  
BP: Are you  
K: Yeah  
BP: Where are you going to go  
K: I don't know yet  
BP: Are you staying in ... or going somewhere else  
K: I don't know I might go somewhere else  
BP: So you don't know if they'll do French in your new school  
K: Yeah  
BP: But you would like to  
K: Yeah  
BP: Great, many thanks

### **Daniel**

BP: We'll talk about the French a bit, just tell me what you like and what you don't like so much, just anything you want to say really. What do you like best  
D: Rounders and playing my nintendo, playing this 15 computer that's my mums, it's called Doom, its for fifteens and its' really funny, my dad he always plays on it, he plays

with this shot gun, so all I have it's like a little machine gun and he puts it on nightmare, that makes it really hard

BP: What about the French class what do you like in the French lesson

D: I like learning the new words, like drinks, like eau mineral and coca, and I like learning the sports and once we did this sheet of French it was this vampire which you had to colour in red and black and it would say the numbers and the colours

BP: Yes I remember that it was like upside down wasn't it? With the castle and the vampire and all that. You liked that did you

D: And there was this game that was XX it was like if you like football J'aime le football if you said it right then you go forward a bit and if you got I think it was a star or two stars then the first one with 5 stars or 5 counters, yeah, wins the game

BP: Right and what about the things you don't like so much

D: Don't think there's anything I don't like except for, except for tasting new foods I don't like

BP: What about the French lesson though, things you don't like so much there

D: Nothing I think I don't like there

BP: Good, that's good if you like it all. Do you mind if you make a mistake

D: Sometimes I don't like the fuss or something cause I don't xx if I don't have a pen or if I don't have my pencil case

BP: What if you say something in class and it's wrong do you mind if you make a mistake

D: It's OK I don't mind,

BP: You don't mind

D: No, because I xx write something from the board but I did it one letter wrong that made it wrong and everybody laughed at me but I don't really care

BP: You don't really mind do you

D: No but it was a bit embarrassing because I don't like being laughed at

BP: But everybody makes mistakes so it's not the end of the world is it? Somebody else makes a mistake some other time, nobody is perfect really...do you put your hand up when you think you know something

D: Only when im sure

BP: And if you're not sure

D: I don't put my hand up

BP: You don't bother. What about English or maths or science



D: Maths is OK yeah, science with the mustard seeds, that's OK cause we haven't done much of it

BP: What about putting your hand up do you put it up more in other subjects

D: Yeah, probably I would yeah

BP: So in French you think more carefully before you put it up

D: Yeah

BP: Ok anything else you want to say about the French lesson

D: Anything, I like working in a group because there's other people I like being in partners, sometimes I don't like being on my own because sometimes I need a little bit of help but it's OK, I like listening to the recorder that's plugged in near the blackboard and once I made a mistake I felt it was an orange juice but it wasn't it was orangina

BP: Very close though, only a very little little slip, cause one is fizzy and the other one is still, but still an orangy drink

D: Yeah cause it's j xx d'orange and it just sounded like orangina

D: Yeah cause d'orange... orangina

BP: Exactly cause it's like orange both times isn't it the same middle bit...anything else you can think of

D: No

BP: OK, many thanks merci.

## **Emily**

BP: Right Emily, tell me something about the French, what you like what you like don't like anything you want to tell me really

E: Well, when Take That were together I liked Take That but now they've split up I like Spice Girls, my best friend's name is Jamila ah...

BP: What about the French though, the French lessons

E: Yeah, I enjoy French, it's cause I have about 2 or 3 French books at home and I look in them sometimes

BP: What do you like about it, what do you like best

E: I don't know it's just learning another language really it's quite fun

BP: What makes it fun

E: I don't know having like the cards and writing on the sheets, so

BP: Do you find it easy

E: Some parts of it is quite easy but some are a bit difficult so

BP: Tell me something you find easy

E: When you have to tick the boxes that's quite easy and listen to the tape is quite easy

BP: And what's more difficult

E: When you have to like write a sentence or something that's quite difficult sometimes, cause Miss...writes it on the board you have to keep looking up and like what's the next letter does it have an accent over it and like so that part is quite difficult

BP: What else

E: I don't know really

BP: Do you put your hand up if you think you know an answer

E: Yeah but sometimes I'm not too sure so when I'm not too sure I don't but if I definitely know then I do so

BP: What about other subjects do you put your hand up more

E: Yeah, she doesn't, Miss doesn't normally ask us like ask questions normally but when ..she does, yes sometimes I do

BP: If you make a mistake do you mind

E: Not really

BP: No? If you make a mistake in maths or English do you mind then

E: No, you just, you just like and then in the maths like Miss marks it and then you have to go back to the corrections and stuff and in English you have to like if you've done a wrong word you'd have to put it out because you're doing it in xx you're not allowed xx

BP: Do you think you're good in French

E: Quite good probably not as good as I could be though

BP: Why do you say that

E: Sometimes I forget the words and that and it's a bit difficult sometimes

BP: What remembering them

E: Yeah, and remembering how to say them and pronouncing them

BP: Do you think it would help or you would find it easier if you had homework to help you remember the words

E: I don't know really my mum would probably help me xx so it would make it a bit easier, yeah it might make it a bit easier, we've had it before we had to colour in this sheet and it said the French words in the colours in French and you had to do that its the first thing in my French book actually it's the first thing we did on xx

BP: Do you like colouring in

E: Yeah but what annoys me is when your pencil goes xx I can't be bothered to go and sharpen it

BP: You have to get somebody to sharpen for you

E: Yes so I do, I let people use my colours and if it's blunt they go and sharpen it  
 BP: They sharpen it up for you, very smart. Anything else you want to tell me or want to talk about, in French  
 E: Not really  
 BP: No  
 E: Not really  
 BP: Do you speak any other languages  
 E: No, my cousin speaks Spanish cause she went to Mexico I think and she was learning Spanish  
 BP: May be you can learn Spanish in secondary school later on. Do you want to continue with French  
 E: Yeah, I enjoy it  
 BP: Good, great, merci  
 E: Thank you

### **Karley**

BP: Tell me a little about the French, the things you like  
 K: Learning about all the different sport and drinks and playing games and numbers to 20  
 K : I enjoy learning new words and I think it's quite good doing the tapes and I've got two French books at home and I always learn the new words, it's not really difficult  
 BP: It's all easy... all good fun  
 K: Sometimes  
 BP: Sometimes you don't like it  
 K: About one or two time I don't  
 BP: When you don't like it why  
 K: There is about 100 people put their hand up most of the time Miss chooses somebody else  
 BP: What about making a mistake do you mind making a mistake  
 K: Not really I just cross it out  
 BP: What about speaking, when you make a mistake  
 K: I just say it again  
 BP: What do you enjoy most  
 K: Numbers  
 BP: You like numbers... in maths...you're good at maths

K: I thought it was a bee

BP: Do you keep trying or give up easily

K: Sometimes I keep trying and trying all the time

BP: What about saying things in French do you find that easy...What's funny

K: I don't know... it's just quiet

BP: What about the teacher speaking in French

K: I find it easy when she says something I do know in French like 'écoutez'

BP: What does that mean

K: Is it listen... I can't remember what look this ways is

BP: Regardez...you find that easy do you...what about reading and writing

K: Yes when we done that thing about the waitress we found that good in our group

BP: The role pay and the cafe...Do you want to tell me something else....you're happy

### **Jamila**

BP: We'll just talk about the French a little bit, the things you like, the things you find easy, what do you really like about it

J: It's I'm not really sure about that

BP: Do you find it easy or do you find it difficult

J: It's in between

BP: In between, sort of a little bit difficult, what do you find difficult, what things

J: Like something like if she's saying something in French like and she doesn't say it in English I get a bit confused

BP: About what it means, do you prefer it if she talks in English do you, if she explains in English

J: Yeah

BP: What do you like best speaking, listening, reading in French, writing

J: Reading

BP: Yes, why is that

J: Because it's much easier than writing French

BP: You find writing difficult do you

J: Yeah, writing French

BP: What do you think is good fun, what things do you find good fun

J: Mmh

BP: What do you enjoy

J: I enjoy playing French games and

BP: Good

J: And learning and new French words, that's all really

BP: Alright, now do you mind when you make a mistake

J: I don't mind

BP: What do you do, you try again or

J: Yeah

BP: What about putting your hand up when you know something do you put your hand up

J: Yeah

BP: All the time

J: No, not all the time

BP: But most times usually, do you speak any other languages Jamila

J: Yeah

BP: What do you speak

J: I can speak my own language

BP: Which is what

J: xx

BP: xx and where do you speak that

J: At home sometimes...

BP: And which country is this

J: I'm not quite sure

BP: No I don't know either really, you speak that at home.

J: Yeah

BP: Do your parents help you with French as well

J: No cause they don't know any French

BP: Not to worry not everybody does

J: My brother knows, as well, my brother knows

BP: So he can help you

J: Yeah

BP: OK, we'll stop it here

**Rebecca**

BP: XX a bit about the French, tell me the things you like

R: Why

BP: Just to find out really, what you like, what you don't like so much, what's good fun, anything you can think of really

R: Mmh...I like animals

BP: What about French...Do you like speaking, listening or writing

R: I prefer speaking it

BP: You don't mind speaking aloud in front of the class...what if you make mistake

R: I don't mind

BP: Do you put your hand up a lot...you do don't you, I noticed, what about writing....do you find that difficult

R: Sort of if you don't know how to spell

BP: Do you find it's good fun French...do you want to continue

R: I speak Czech really...XX she went to Paris for a few days

BP: Did she learn a bit of French

R: I don't know

BP: Do you speak French to her

R: No I mostly speak Czech to her

BP: How long is she with you

R: She is with us till 30 XX

BP: Say something in Czech to me

R: XX

BP: What does it mean

R: Where is my XX Once we were kicking XX the first I learned XX I think I do

BP: What makes you say that XX ...no I don't know, it's probably all wrong, it's getting a bit noisy again, do you think you're doing well in French

R: Mmh, yeah, I think

BP: What makes you say that

R: Don't know

BP: Anything else you want to say

R: In High School you can choose in French or German and then they go on trips

BP: So you go there when you get to that school, which language would you like to do

R: I'm not sure...German is hard

**Mitul**

M: In French

BP: Not in French, about French, learning French

M: I just like the language it's quite hard my dad always says you have to learn something hard

BP: What do you find hard in French

M: I think orange juice in French

BP: Is hard

M: I know how to say it but I'm not very good at spelling it's hard to say or write

BP: Which do you like best, speaking, listening, reading, writing

M: I think listening and writing

BP: Do you like speaking out in class

M: I don't mind...the teacher would say XX and pick someone else

BP: You don't mind

M: I do mind a little bit XX teacher might tell me of

BP: It's worth having a go isn't it you don't have to get everything right all the time

BP: Do you think French is good fun

M: Yeah

BP: Why do you say that

M: Because I'm not really sure actually

BP: What makes it fun

M: The tape

BP: You like listening to the tape

M: Writing down that's quite fun, try and get it right, tests your hearing skills as well then if you get it wrong do it all over again

BP: Do you speak any other languages

M: Swaheli, Gujarati and I know a little bit, bit of Korean, Hindi

BP: What do you speak at home

M: Gujarati and English...with my grandma she doesn't know any English

BP: How come you know all these languages

M: Because I've been to Kenya and in two weeks I learned as much as I could and I got some books at home

BP: Do you like learning languages

M: I know about 6 or 7 ... German my brother does that at Nower Hill, I think I'll have to do that at Nower Hill

BP: Anything else you can think of

M: Not really

BP: No, we'll stop it here then

**Graham**

G: I'm good at names and that and saying drinks and that and I think I'm good at all of it really.

BP: What makes you say that

G: I honestly enjoy doing it and I listen a lot and I learn the words a lot and I sometimes say it to my brother

BP: Good practice

G: I like the subject French, that's all really

BP: You don't find any of it difficult

G: Well some parts of it are a bit difficult like just pronouncing the words I find a bit difficult like pronouncing it sometimes I say words wrong and spelling them

BP: That's difficult isn't it

G: Doing the things at the top xx I find that hard but I like doing it, French

BP: That's the main thing isn't it you think it's good fun

G: Yeah

BP: You want to carry on with it

BP: What about when you make a mistake, do you mind

G: No, not that much, I know xx that, when I make a mistake I know that like it's not like in English xx something that I should know, it's something that I should learn if I make a mistake I'm not really bothered, I'm learning it, I'm learning, xx I don't really care if I make a mistake, I try hard not to but if I do I try and correct it

BP: That's good you just keep trying, what about putting your hand up, do you like that

G: I sometimes do that, if I'm, if I'm quite certain that I know the answer I will put it up

BP: And if you're not so sure you think twice do you

G: I think about it, then put it up

BP: Do you like working with a partner, with a group

G: Not much, I like in pairs more than in groups

BP: Why is that

G: I like working with my friend more than a whole group

BP: You mean the whole class

G: Yeah, or just like four because it's then you don't have to work that hard with all your group you just have a pair to do it

BP: What else do you like

G: Can't think of anything else

BP: You like most of it anyhow you said, didn't you



G: Yeah

BP: What about the teacher speaking in French do you prefer when Miss explains in English or are you quite happy with the French

G: I'm sometimes quite happy with the French but if there's but sometimes I'm not I'd rather have it in English rather than French

BP: And why is that

G: Cause sometimes I don't get all the words I don't know them when she says things I don't really understand what she is saying, in English I know English, I know what to do

BP: That's a lot easier isn't it. Do you think you're good at French

G: A bit not a bit xx

BP: OK

G: Yeah, I like it but, I think I'm alright, I think I'm xx

BP: I think you're good at it, I'm sure you are

G: Shall I go back now

**Robert**

R: Mmh

BP: Not in.. you don't have to say it in French, just about the French lesson

R: Order drinks and XX

BP: You like that

R: And all the other things like the foods and the, all the school things like in the classroom

BP: What do you like best, speaking or listening or filling in the worksheets

R: I like filling in the worksheets and listening to the tape recorder

BP: You like that best do you

R: Yes, cause usually the teacher xx will explain xx what I'm going to be doing so like if she just says it the first time you don't know what we're doing it's like you don't know what what's happening or something

BP: When the teacher explains do, when she explains in French do you find that easy

R: Sometimes, sometimes it depends what she says cause I don't always know so I know some things and I don't know others

BP: So you like the worksheets and the tape, what do you find a bit more difficult

R: When she says something and I haven't like like xx

BP: If it's new and you hear it the first time

R: Yeah

BP: What about writing

R: It's OK, it's just not really xx wondering what the spelling's are

BP: It's a bit more difficult isn't it

R: The spellings yeah xx

BP: What makes you say that

R: Well it's like xx difficult than the English words

BP: Very true, do you like speaking in class

R: Sort of

BP: Not too keen are you

R: No not really

BP: What if you make a mistake

R: Mmh

BP: Do you mind

R: Not really

BP: You prefer not to speak out in front of

R: Yeah, I don't mind

BP: But you're not that keen are you...or are you

R: No, not really

BP: It's alright not everybody likes the same things you know everybody is different, some people like reading some people like writing things some people like tapes some people like speaking everyboy likes different things... Are you happy in the French lesson...are you looking forward to next year...do you want to carry on with it...do you speak any other languages

R: Yeah cause I go to Sunday school I learn Hebrew

BP: Oh do you, nice

R: Cause I'm Jewish

BP: How is that is that more difficult

R: Yes, much more dificult it's like you have to do a whole paragraph xx

BP: What learn by heart

R: No just you have to be able to read it from the book, like the letters are much more difficult, we don't have like, we have like separate vowels we don't have vowels from the actual like in the English alphabet they use like i, e, a, o, u but they're from the alphabet but we have like different we have like vowels that are part of the alphabet

BP: Like what can you give me an example

R: There's one that's got two dots makes an xx three dots let's say xx and it's not part of the alphabet it's xx but with a dot in the middle

BP: Right, so the different dots give you different sounds that makes it quite difficult doesn't it...but still good fun

R: Mmh it's actually xx boring

BP: You keep at it cause it's all worthwhile

R: Cause when you're 13 we have to have a Mitra like it's just like practising getting ready for it

BP: So you need to know for then don't you

R: The one thing about the Mitra is my cousin, he is having his in October and I'll have to say a speech there

BP: Do you, in Hebrew

R: No, XX

BP: In English

R: Yeah

BP: So you don't need to practice that much for it

R: Not really but it's going to be a big crowd cause last time I went to my cousins one they didn't say the speeches but this time I'm going to and my other cousin is going to have to say one too

BP: But you'll be alright I'm sure you will be alright if you make a mistake so what it's not the end exactly, everybody makes them. OK, I'll stop this now

### **Natasha**

N: I liked it when we done the sports cause Miss used to ask us what sports we liked and what we didn't and she used to asked us to put in sentences, I like doing the drinks because we had to act out one person as a waiter and one person as the other person, that's it

BP: What do you like most speaking or listening to the tape or reading or writing

N: Reading, speaking and listening to the tape

BP: Do you find the tape easy

N: Mmh

BP: And what about speaking, you don't mind speaking out in front of the class

N: No

BP: What if you make a mistake

N: Yes I xx it because Miss asks us to put our hands up but I'll only do it if I 'm really sure and I know I won't get it wrong

BP: So you do mind if you make a mistake

N: Mmh

BP: What's good fun, what's really good fun in the French class

N: I like it when Miss speaks French

BP: You like listening to her do you

N: It's nice when people come round and they hear us speaking in French and different languages

BP: You like the French language do you

N: Mmh

BP: Do you want to carry on next year

N: Mmh

BP: Do you speak any other languages

N: My dad's Italian so I speak a little bit of Italian and I speak English

BP: What do you speak at home

N: English cause my dad's at work

BP: Say something in Italian to me

N: I can't really speak it that much

BP: Something, a little bit

N: Come stai

BP: What do I say... Stoi

N: Stoi bene that's I'm OK

BP: How are you, I'm OK, stoi bene really nice...tell me something else, tell me something you really really like...do you like speaking or do you like listening to the tape, what about worksheets

N: Yeah, I like them

BP: What about working in pairs or in a group

N: Yeah, when we done the sports I liked it because we had to ask each other questions what sports we liked and everything and I like it when we do things in our French book

BP: You like that as well do you...and what do you not like so much

N: I don't know, I don't like reading in French that much

BP: Why's that

N: Just don't like it

BP: Do you like it in English reading

N: Yeah

BP: So it's just the French reading you don't like, everybody likes different things so that's perfectly alright. What about when you need help

N: I ask Miss or sometimes I ask my friend who's next to me and if they don't know I ask Miss

BP: So you ask your friend first and if she doesn't know you ask the teacher. Does your friend ask you

N: Yes, sometimes

BP: Do you find...go on

N: Cause sometimes I'm not too sure if we have to tick one box if it's right and cross the other so I ask are we supposed to cross the other box or do we just leave it, things like that

BP: So you help each other which is nice. What about new words do you find new words easy

N: If they are long and hard to pronounce they're a bit hard but after a while I get the hang of them they're quite easy

BP: Right, anything else you want to tell me, you can think of

N: No

BP: You're happy

N: Yeah

BP: Good, so am I

### **Geoffrey**

BP: XX What do you like about it, tell me something you really enjoy

G: Learning it

BP: Mmh, do you like all of it

G: Yeah, just like all of it really

BP: You like speaking it

G: Asking questions in French or talking in French

BP: Reading

G: Yeah in French, writing in French

BP: It's all good fun is it

BP: Do you find it all easy

G: No, not most of the time

BP: You find it difficult do you

G: Yeah, sometimes

BP: Which bits do you find most difficult

G: When the tape's on cause it talks a little bit too fast

BP: A lot of people find that difficult...so you find the tape a bit difficult, what else do you find difficult

G: When sometimes the teacher asks questions and like we don't know what it means

BP: In French

G: Yeah

BP: Do you prefer it when she explains in English

G: Yeah

BP: It's a bit easier isn' it

G: Yeah

BP: What about worksheets do you like those

G: Yeah

BP: Yeah, are they good fun

G: Yeah and games

BP: What about working in pairs or in groups

G: That's alright yeah

BP: Do you prefer that or do you rather work on your own

G: In groups

BP: You prefer that, why do you like that better

G: Like, like and then you can help each other and making it XX

BP: XX find that a bit difficult

G: In front of everybody

BP: Mmh

G: I find that a bit difficult

BP: Do you mind making a mistake then do you

G: Sometimes

BP: I do as well, some people don't mind, some people mind. When you think you know something do you put your hand up or

G: Yeah, we put our hand up when we know something like when she asks us what's this and then out of the drinks we don't like xx café xx coca

BP: So you're happy with most of it are you

G: Yeah

BP: It's good fun

G: Yeah

BP: You want to continue, carry on with it

G: Definitely

BP: Definitely, well done

**Michael**

BP: Right Michael tell me a little bit about the French then, what do you like about it, learning it

M: Well I like learning about all the sorts of new topics we do, including sports and sports and dislikes and I like saying what sorts of sports we like and what we don't like and I like the topic what we're doing at the moment on drinks all about the different drinks. I also like doing counting up all the numbers, learning with the numbers and that's about all really

BP: What about speaking, listening, reading, writing all those things, which ones do you like best

M: I like XX saying, saying about, saying what I wrote down in my book, j'aime le football and je, je voudrais un coca

BP: So you like speaking in French

M: Yeah

BP: What if you make a mistake do you mind

M: No, I don't, I would like to get them all right really, but I don't mind if people go na na na, I just get on with my thing

BP: Just keep trying, yeah

M: Yeah

BP: What about the things you don't like so much is there anything you're not too keen on

M: No because like I really like learning about a different language really and I find it quite fun

BP: Good. Do you speak any other languages

M: At home, not at home actually I go to, I'm Jewish so I go to a Jewish school on Sundays and I learn Hebrew

BP: How's that, is that easy

M: No it's not as easy as French, it's quite it's quite hard

BP: What makes it hard

M: It's just because there's in French there's not so much feminines and masculine but in Hebrew there's loads of feminine and masculine and that stuff is quite hard to learn

BP: What even more than in French

M: Yeah, there is loads of it

BP: Really

M: Yeah

BP: So with every word you have to learn what it is do you

M: Well some of it xx is the same xx some of it is masculine and feminine

BP: Right, so that makes it quite difficult

M: Yeah

BP: Do your parents help you with the French at all

M: French, yeah, I told them, sometimes I tell them what we're doing, what I've done at school and then they'd like sort of just test me and sometimes like, say I'd said I learned about the numbers and I tell them and they ask me what one is that sort of stuff xx sometimes when I got the chance to tell them

BP: You do

M: Ya

BP: Do you think you're doing well in French

M: Yeah, I think I'm doing well

BP: What makes you say that

M: It's just that I, I'm enjoying it a lot and I'm learning a lot from it so I really just want to go to France and try and test some of it out

BP: Great so you haven't been yet

M: No I've never been to France

BP: But when you get to year seven

M: Yeah

BP: There's a school trip isn't there

M: Yeah, so it's going to be quite good

BP: It'll be really nice, you're looking forward to that

M: Yeah

BP: You'll learn a bit more French by then and you'll be really OK, make a good job of it

M: Yeah

BP: Excellent, anything else you want to say

M: Not really

BP: Are you happy



M: I'm really happy learning French, I think it's really fun

BP: Right, well done

### **Laura**

BP: Tell me something you really like about French, learning French

L: Doing the drinks and things like kind of order and when we do drinks and sports and things I like writing them down a lot, I'm not sure what I like sometimes

BP: What do you find easy

L: XX is writing them down

BP: You find that easy do you writing... what do you find more difficult

L: If you have to listening to a tape going on and on and on

BP: What about when Miss speaks French do you find that easy

L: Yeah

BP: But the tape is more difficult is it

L: Yeah, they speak to you really fast and I can't make out what they're saying at all

BP: What's good fun in the French lesson

L: You get to do colouring sheets and things and get to do writing sheets

BP: You like those do you

L: Yeah XX

BP: What about working in a group or with with somebody else

L: I don't really like working in a group because they always tell you what to do and I don't like it if they tell me what to do

BP: You prefer to do your own thing do you

L: Yeah cause they always tell you what to do and it gets annoying

BP: What about speaking up in front of the class do you mind speaking in French

L: Not really, it depends what I have to say, in other words it's OK

BP: Do you put your hand up a lot

L: Yeah

BP: Only if you're sure or do you take a risk anyhow

L: I usually just take a think and then I just put my hand up and if I put my hand up like I'm desperate to put my hand up and I really know the answer and I ke to get chosen

BP: And if you make a mistake do you mind

L: No xx

BP: Are you happy in French, in the French lesson

L: It depends what kind. If it's like hard French I don' t mind, if it's like XX

I don't really like it

BP: No, you don't, would you prefer to learn a different language

L: No

BP: Just not too keen, why do you think that is

L: I don't know I just I don't know just do

BP: Just don't like it that much

L: I do like it but it depends if it's XX if it's XX

L: We do a lot of drawing, we write a sentence down and do a drawing along with it that's why I usually like my French

BP: The drawing

L: Yeah

BP: You like that best

L: Yeah

BP: What about English what do you like in English

L: Nothing much

BP: No, you don't like English either? What's your favourite subject

L: Maths

BP: Really, do you like number work and stuff like that

L: Yeah, I like the lady just there because she speaks Swedish

BP: Do you speak Swedish

L: Yeah

BP: At home

L: No, my my aunt used to live in Sweden one day she just went there, she comes back and then my cousins came and then XX we go there and we stayed there for three weeks and they just told us quite a lot of words and I'm beginning to understand it now

BP: Do you like Swedish better do you

L: Probably yeah

BP: Why do you think that is

L: Because I'm used to the language and you don't have to colour in the sheets XX

BP: But I thought you liked colouring in the sheets

L: Yeah I do but like it's XX really really really hard but I just do any colour you're supposed to be doing them like blue, pink and yellow like I can't always make out what it says because it says, it's got this funny writing, I get muddled up between blue and black

BP: Do you want to carry on with French

L: Yeah

BP: So it's not that bad

L: No

BP: OK, do you want to say anything else

L: Not really

BP: Are you happy

L: Yeah

BP: Alright then

### **Kook Yeong**

BP: So where did you learn French

KY: I first started it in Africa at school with a French teacher

BP: What was that like did you like it

KY: Yeah I also had a French friend I even learned French at home as well a French tutor came every day

BP: Right, so you're quite good are you

KY: Yeah

BP: So what about learning French now, what do you like about it

KY: It's mmh, it's all fun learning French

BP: It's fun? What's fun what makes it fun

KY: Learning on how to say the words in French that you don't know

BP: Mmh, what else do you like

KY: I like mmh, like the way everyone XX speaks and translates the French terms

BP: That helps if the teacher translates does it

KY: Yeah

BP: Do you like speaking yourself

KY: No

BP: No

KY: No

BP: Why not

KY: Cause it's a little bit embarrassing

BP: What do you like then reading or writing

KY: Reading, writing and playing time

BP: And what about listening to tapes

KY: It's good as well

BP: But you don't like speaking it much

KY: No

BP: So when Miss asks you a question how do you feel

KY: I feel that I have to go for this answer to get top mark

BP: So you don't mind speaking out then

BP: Do you put your hand up a lot

KY: Yeah

BP: So how come you put your hand up a lot if you don't like speaking

KY: I put my hand up for the things I know what to do but when I don't know what she's talking about I feel that I'm going to get it wrong so I just really don't put my hand up

BP: You play safe don't you...are you happy in the French class

KY: Yeah

BP: Yeah, you want to carry on with it

KY: Yeah, I want to carry on with it

BP: Anything else you would like to tell me

KY: xx Nothing

BP: Do your parents help you with French

KY: No they don't know any French they just take us to the French tutor and then go somewhere else

BP: Right, so how often do you see the French tutor

KY: Every Thursday

BP: For how long

KY: I think it's about one hour or one hour 30

BP: How's that do you find that good fun

KY: Yeah

BP: How many of you in the group

KY: Two

BP: Only two

KY: Just my brother and me

BP: Right

KY: We might also move into a class in French, cause our French tutor said that we are catching up quickly so she might move us into a class

BP: What with more people

KY: Yeah

**Sapna**

BP: Tell me something you like about it, what you like about learning French

S: I like about sports, learning about sports and how to speak French and learning all types of drinks and food and names and things like that that's all

BP: Do you find it easy

S: Sometimes

BP: What sort of things do you find easy

S: To say what my name is, age is and something about myself

BP: And what do you find a bit more difficult, if anything

S: How to say some of the sports, like swimming I get confused but I know the rest of the sports

BP: Because it's a long word isn't it

S: Yes

BP: What do you like best speaking, listening, reading

S: I like speaking and listening and writing

BP: All of it

S: Yes

BP: Is it all good fun

S: Yes

BP: What about when you speak up in class do you mind

S: No I don't mind

BP: No? And if you make a mistake

S: I don't really mind because it's my first go, I'm trying to do something

BP: And that's important isn't it.. Everybody makes mistakes, I make mistakes, nobody is perfect, what about putting your hand up do you do that a lot

S: Yeah, first I have to think what I'm going to say and then I put my hand up, because if the teacher chooses me and I've forgotten what I'm going to say

BP: Very true so you think it through first

S: Yeah

BP: Do you think you're good at French

S: Yeah, a little bit

BP: What makes you say that

S: Because I don't need my xx word song when I say something and I say it like French sometimes

BP: So got the right accent

S: I think so

BP: Do your parents help you

S: They don't know French but I just have to learn myself

BP: Like most people, yeah, but it's nice that you're trying

S: My cousins teach me as well they still learn French

BP: So they can help you

S: Yeah

BP: Do you want to carry on with it

S: Yeah

BP: Do you think it's good fun

S: Yeah, nice to learn another language

BP: Very true, you know English and you can speak Hindi and French a little bit what next

S: English

BP: Do you want to say anything else

S: No

### **Deborah**

BP: You just tell me a little bit about learning French, what you like about it

D: I like the way they say it when they say like xx and things like that, I like learning French xx

BP: Why do you like it do you think

D: I don't really know

BP: You just like it

BP: That's good, what do you find a bit more difficult, if anything

D: Nothing really

BP: Speaking, listening, reading writing, all easy

D: Speaking I can't do

BP: You can't

D: Yeah

BP: Why do you think you can't do that

D: I don't know, I don't know all the French words

BP: So you find that a bit more difficult

D: Yes

BP: What about listening to the tape recorder

D: That's quite easy  
BP: That's easy is it  
D: Yes  
BP: And listening to Miss  
D: Miss, yes that's quite easy as well  
BP: Good...so it's good fun really is it  
D: Yes  
BP: Do you speak any other languages Deborah  
D: Yes, Korean  
BP: What do you speak at home  
D: I speak English  
BP: Do your parents help you with the French  
D: My dad's in America, my mum's still in Korea and I'm staying with my auntie now  
BP: Does she help you with the French a little bit  
D: No she does not know how to speak French  
BP: Not to worry my parents don't know, we'll have to learn ourselves won't we  
BP: Do you think you're doing well in French  
D: Yes  
BP: What makes you say that  
D: I don't really know  
BP: But you feel good about it, you want to carry with it  
D: Yes  
BP: Would you like to learn any other languages  
D: Yes  
BP: Which one  
D: German  
BP: You learn that when you get to High School  
D: My mum already knows Germany  
BP: Does she  
D: Yes  
BP: So she could help you  
D: xx book  
BP: So she knows quite a lot  
D: Yes  
BP: So she can help you when you start learning that

D: Yeah

BP: Do you want to say anything else

D: No

BP: You're sure

D: Yes

### **Sanji**

BP: Tell me a little bit about the French, things you like about it, what do you like in the French lesson

S: Drink

BP: Learning about the drinks, what else

S: Sports

BP: What about speaking it or listening to the tape

S: Speaking French

BP: You like that

S: No more

BP: No more...what about listening to the tape

S: Tape

BP: Tape, you like that

S: Yes

BP: What about reading

S: I like

BP: What about writing

S: No

BP: No...why not

S: Because writing is too hard

BP: Difficult...do you speak any other languages

BP: No...so you write English, you can write in English ...but French writing is hard...

What about speaking up in front of the class

S: No

BP: You don't like that, why not

S: Because of the children's laughing

BP: So if you make a mistake and they laugh you don't like that....you prefer to read and listen...what about putting your hand up

S: Yes



BP: What if Miss asks you a question

S: What

BP: If Miss asks you a question do you mind or is that OK

S: Ok

BP: You don't mind...that's OK...do you like French

S: What

BP: Is it good fun

S: Yes

BP: Do you want to carry on with it

S: Yes

BP: Good...do you want to tell me anything else

S: No

### **Mairaj**

M: I like doing in French about the drinks and xx and how to say money...example for the teacher, I like doing the sports

BP: Good, what about speaking it

M: I find speaking it easy, sometimes my pronunciation is not as well as on the tapes, sometimes I think

BP: Why do you think sometimes

M: Sometimes I don't put my hand up because I feel shy sometimes, cause I normally do that in other xx when the teacher asks us questions in other subjects like

BP: But in French you find it a bit more, you want to be sure before you put your hand up

M: Yeah

BP: You don't like making mistakes then do you

M: It's like an jus d'orange I didn't know how to pronounce it properly so I had to go over and over it again

BP: You keep trying until you get it right...What about listening to the tape recorder

M: XX pretty simple and when it goes on a piece of sheet sometimes now I can understand and if you've done the words and it includes those words that we have learned and I like the...

BP: So that's quite easy then isn't it

M: I liked it when we had to cut out the little pictures and stick them onto the piece of card and write about the name and then and what they liked and je n'aime pas

BP: When we did the sports people, you liked that

M: And I liked doing the j'aime and je n'aime pas, I found that pretty easy, and about the age, about when we did the ages

BP: With the numbers

M: Yeah, I found that pretty easy as well

BP: So most of it

M: And some subjects I found hard because I didn't understand and I got some wrong in my French book

BP: Which were those do you remember

M: I remember I did I set it out, about the colours. First before you came we were doing colours and we had to write the colours in the xx and I did it the wrong way

BP: Well we all make mistakes nobody is perfect, when you get to next year you'll do the colours again and then you can revise it again ... you hear them again you learn them next time round, no problem

M: I can't remember the other subjects though

BP: You probably did quite a lot because you were learning all year weren't you...do you think you are doing well in French

M: Yeah

BP: What makes you say that

M: Because I think because I've been, I understand a lot of things and I can say it properly

BP: Which is good if you can understand a lot isn't it... good news....do you want to say anything else...you're happy...good, merci.

### **Thomas**

BP: XX Anything about learning French what you like what you don't like what you find easy...what do you like about it

T: Well I like it when we done the sports like the tennis and all that, I like doing the J'aime, I didn't like the Je n'aime pas

BP: Why not

T: Because Je n'aime pas like I don't hate a lot of things

BP: You like most things

T: Yeah

BP: What else did you like

T: On the drinks coca cola and all that

BP: What about speaking it

T: I liked it a bit because I can only do a bit when I XX

BP: What about reading in French

T: Well, I did like it and I didn't, half and half

BP: Which half did you like

T: Mostly I didn't like it

BP: What about listening to a tape

T: It's a bit hard because when it went fast you couldn't hear it and all

BP: What about writing

T: It's alright I quite like that cause XX French

BP: Do you like it all in all French...

T: Yeah

BP: Yes or yes yes yes

T: Yes yes yes

BP: Or is it Ok

T: OK

BP: It's OK. What's really good fun...what's the best, the best bit the absolute top

T: When we were playing that game when you had to write on the board and you

BP: You liked that did you...we had like two teams didn't we, competing

T: And XX

BP: Yes cause we had two groups didn't we

T: Two points in one and three for le natation

BP: For the difficult ones if you got it right first time

T: I got three

BP: May be we should play more games then if you like those, what about putting your hand up, do you do that a lot

T: Yeah, I do now, I used to be, I used to do it sometimes but now I'm xx more

BP: You do more...why do you think that is

T: Cause I'm getting older and older and it's carrying on and carrying on

BP: You feel more confident don't you, you feel more sure that you know. What if you make a mistake do you mind

T: Not that much, cause like I could just get an eraser and erase it out

BP: What if you make one in speaking

T: I might just go...and start again

BP: Keep trying. It's the best isn't it...so you like French do you...you want to carry on with it... sure... good, everybody likes it....so far unless Scott the last one is going to say no I hate it

**Scott**

BP: XX You like about learning French...do you like it

S: Yep

BP: What do you like best

S: The drinks and the food and learning sports

BP: What's really good fun

S: Learning going to a cafe and get drinks

BP: Like ordering drinks doing little roleplays

S: Yep

BP: Do you like working in a group

S: Yes

BP: Do you prefer that to working on your own

S: Yes

BP: Why's that

S: Because then it's a lot less hard

BP: You can help each other can't you...what do you like best, speaking or listening or reading

S: Listening

BP: Listening to the teacher or listening to the tape

S: The tape

BP: You find that easy

S: Yeah

BP: And what do you find difficult, if anything, it might all be easy

S: Understanding when Miss speaks French

BP: You find that quite difficult....you find the tape easier

S: Yeah

BP: So would you prefer it if Miss speaks English, if she explains in English

S: Yeah

BP: That makes life a bit easier does it

S: Yeah

BP: Anything else you like

S: No

BP: What about putting your hand up, do you do that a lot

S: No

BP: No...why not

S: XX

BP: What about English or maths do you put your hand up there a lot

S: Yeah

BP: More than in French

S: Yeah

BP: But you don't have to you know you can still know somethings and don't have to put your hand up all the time

S: Yeah

BP: Do you enjoy learning French

S: Yeah

BP: A lot or a little

S: A lot

BP: Really...you don't find it hard

S: I do a bit

BP: But you still like it

S: Yeah

BP: You want to carry on with it

S: Yeah

BP: Do you speak any other languages

S: No

BP: But you speak English and a bit of French and when you get older you can learn something else...great, anything else you want to say

S: No

BP: Sure

S: Yes

BP: Are you happy

S: Yeah

BP: We'll go and play some rounders then

**APPENDIX D**  
**Lesson Observations - School Two**  
**Year 6**

Group One  
Lesson One

Lesson focuses on asking questions: 'Comment s'appelle-t-il/elle?',

'Où habites-il/elle?', 'Quel âge a-t-il/elle?' using personal pronouns

Teacher writes on chalkboard: Elle s'appelle/Il s'appelle

Teacher gives model using pupils in class

Choral class repetition of both questions and answers

Child walks behind other child and asks question: 'Comment s'appelle-t-il/elle?'

several children practise in this way

Teacher asks: 'If I say 'où habites tu?', 'où habite elle?' 'où habite il?' what am I asking?'

Some pupils answer correctly in English

Choral repetition of questions

Teacher: Who can ask how old is he?

One pupil provides correct answer

Teacher asks how did you know about inserting a 't'?

Girl answers that she did because teacher earlier said 'comment s'appelle-t-il?'

Choral repetition of 'quel âge a-t-il?'

Through out lesson there are plenty of hands up but by the same pupils

A handful do not answer any questions and seem clearly bore.

Teacher introduces: 'Combien de frères as- tu?' and asks: 'Qu'est ce que c'est en anglais?'

One girl volunteers 'how many brothers do you have?.'

Same with 'soeurs'

Teacher: Moi j'ai 4 frères et une soeur

Girl: J'ai trois frères, trois soeurs

Teacher: 'If you want to say you haven't got any you say 'Je n'ai pas de...'

Choral repetitions of 'Je n'ai pas de...'

Teacher writes on chalkboard: Je n'ai pas de...

Several pupils use this to add frères/soeurs

Six pupils have not put their hand up at all so far

Teacher: 'What's the word for mother?'

No answers come forward

Teacher: 'Sounds like 'père' but with a different starting letter

One pupil comes up with 'mère'.

Teacher writes on chalkboard: 'Je suis fils unique'

All the boys repeat: 'Je suis fils unique'

Teacher writes on board: 'Je suis fille unique'

All the girls repeat

Whole class repeats both sentences

Teacher: How do you say 'I haven't got any...?'

Nobody remembers

Teacher: 'Je n'ai pas de frères.'

Checks understanding in English.

Teacher: 'The other phrase you need is: 'Je n'ai pas de soeurs/frères'

Teacher: 'Je suis fils unique', what does it mean?'

Nobody knows/guesses

Have they been repeating earlier without understanding?

Teacher clarifies in English and moves on to tape with worksheet with speech bubbles on brothers and sisters

Teacher: 'Ecoutez bien' uses body language to support setting up listening exercise

Class listens attentively

Teacher stops tape after first speech bubble: 'What do you think is the word for family?'

Pupils answer correctly 'famille'

Class repeats French after each speech bubble

Teacher: 'What do you think 'grandpère' means?'

Pupils answer correctly with help of picture

Teacher: 'What about 'grandmère', 'tantes' and 'oncle'?'

Answers given are correct

Teacher asks French native-speaker in class for English answers

He struggles with English for female cousin

Teacher explains that there is only one word in English for both male and female cousin

A lot of translation at this stage into English but this seems to keep class involved

Tape is difficult to understand so teacher starts repeating French and checking in English

Some wild guessing here, pupils have clearly not understood

Even one of the brighter girls offers: 'Is this your mum?' for 'Je n'ai pas de...'

'Je suis fils unique' is translated by one boy as 'I'm a boy'

Next exercise is to fill in figures for number of brothers and sisters people on tape have.

Many struggle with this exercise as they do not seem to understand.

Poor sound quality of tape but despite teacher repeating French several times some still don't get it

Many expect the speakers to say something about brothers and sisters even if picture clearly shows they only have the one or the other.

They ask me 'how do we know miss who is speaking?

They don't understand that the person who says 'Je m'appelle ... ' is the one who is speaking.

Teacher checks answers in French: 'Barbara 'qu'est-ce qu'elle a?'

Pupil: 'Un de soeur'

Plenty of hands go up but there are plenty of incorrect answers as well as wild guess work

One hour on what was mainly repetition of old stuff. Most of them are still struggling. Many lack basic learning strategies.

Teacher cannot assume even the most basic skills to be present, e.g. if somebody does not mention any sisters/brothers, they don't have any.

Much inattentiveness



The same pupils take part and the same group more or less simply put up with what is going on.

## Lesson Two

Teacher makes sure that every table has a mixture of boys and girls

Teacher starts by revising: 'Je m'appelle...', 'J'habite...', 'J'ai...ans'

Checks in English: 'If I say...what does it mean?', 'Où habites-tu? What does this mean?'

Gets pupils to ask any of these questions across the class.

Pupil 1: 'Quel âge as-tu?'

Pupil 2: 'Je m'appelle...'

Pupil 3: 'What was it again Sir?'

Teacher gives model sentences again, pupils repeat

Pupil 3: 'Quel âge as-tu?'

Pupil 4: 'Dix ans' (native speaker).

Pupils keep asking around class

Pupil 5: 'Tu habites?'

Pupil 6: 'J'ai dix ans'.

Teacher gives model again, pupil repeats.

There is now some unrest around class, they cannot listen to each other for long

Teacher moves on to use of 'il/elle'.

Teacher: 'We did this a couple of weeks ago.'

Models: 'Il a dix ans', What does it mean?'

Nobody remembers

Teacher tells class, 'il' is for 'he' and 'elle' for 'she'

Pupils are asked to whisper a question into each others ears then tell class information given

Pupil 1: 'Quel âge as-tu?'

Pupil 2: 'J'ai...ans'

Teacher asks: 'Quel âge as-t-il/elle?'

Some pupils answer 'Il/Elle a...'

Teacher checks understanding. 'Trois' is translated as 11, 10 and 6.

They obviously do not remember numbers or the structure 'Il/Elle a...ans'

Pupil asks: 'How do you say it?'

No difference made between pronunciation of un/onze/une

Teacher does whole class practice of un/onze

Teacher: 'Quel âge a-t-elle?'

Pupil answers: 'J'ai dix'

Another case of misunderstanding. They still think they are talking about themselves.

Plenty of hands up although many answers are incorrect

Teacher asks: 'J'habite à...', what does it mean?'

Pupil offers: 'Where do you live?'

He does not seem to know the difference between a statement and a question

Il/elle still causes confusion

Teacher moves on to listening exercise

Tape is rather complicated and we both repeat the French and give them simplified statements, e.g. 'Il s'appelle Max. Il a trois ans.'

After much repetition and passing on answers and using fingers some get it right.

We then organise class in pairs where they have to choose 2 people one male one female from worksheet and tell each other their names and ages. Stars for those who get it right. This seems to motivate most children and most have a go but still only a handful get the language right. A couple of girls say nothing. Again a lot of enthusiasm, many hands up, most are involved but limited learning outcomes.

### Lesson Three

Teacher revises content from last lesson around the class

Pupil1: 'Où habites-tu?' Pupil 2: 'J'ai dix ans.'

Teacher: 'What does the question mean?'

Pupil 2: 'What's your name.'

It is Pupil 2s turn to ask

Pupil 2: What's the question again Sir?

Teacher: 'Où habites-tu?'

Pupil 2 now gets question right

Pupil 3: 'Quel âge as-tu?'

Pupil 4: 'J'habite à...'

Pupil 4, after correction from teacher: 'dix ans'

Teacher gives three possible answers and asks class for the questions

Much confusion

Teacher: 'Combien de frères as-tu?'

Girl next to me: 'What does that mean?'

I tell her the answer, she's quick to put her hand up and obviously very pleased for 'getting it right'

Pupils are asked to stand up in response to the number of brothers or sisters they have got. Teacher: 'lève -toi si tu as...'

There is no checking if they are actually correct in what they do.

Teacher moves on to revising 'il/elle s'appelle', 'Comment s'appelle ton père/ta mère?'

Most pupils get this right and offer ' Il/elle s'appelle...'

Teacher moves on to exercise on worksheet from last week

Half of the class forgot to bring their sheets

Visuals are not very clear on worksheet and tape is rather difficult to understand, contains some language they don't know e.g. 'Combien de personnes y-a-t-il dans ta famille?' Although some should be able to guess

Teacher: 'Nous sommes trois', what do you think this means?'

One girl offers 'I have 3 sisters' when in fact there is no picture with 4 people on the worksheet.

Does not realise that speaker has to include herself!

They probably benefit from copying the French names but the listening advantages are very limited

Teacher moves on to introducing pets with flashcards

Gives model as: 'Voici un/ une...'

Class repeats chorally and individually but individual pronunciation is not checked.

After some practice teacher checks what they remember

Some pupils do remember the names of the animals although the girl next to me has asked 4 times about the French for chat.

Many now lack concentration. Some suck their thumbs while speaking!

Teacher starts 'game' where those who remember an animal correctly get to hold the card. This goes down very well. Plenty of hands up and disappointment amongst those who don't get a card.

Teacher tells class that they can say 'Je voudrais plus animal' to get an animal from somebody else.

Some use 'je voudrais' correctly but miss out gender of animal use single vocab only.

Teacher moves on to animal worksheet

Teacher writes on chalkboard: 'Tu as un animal?' repeated by class

Pupils do 'sondage' around the classroom to find out how many pupils have what animal. They are meant to ask 'tu as un animal?' and answer oui/non or 'J'ai...'

On sheet they put ticks against animal

Most of the children I speak to try to use the French question, much confusion between chien/chat

Lots of enjoyment.

#### Lesson Four

Teacher revises brothers/sisters

Teacher asks me: 'Tu as des frères /des soeurs?'

I give the first answer: 'J'ai deux soeurs'

Teacher asks for meaning

Teacher asks: 'Qui a des frères des sours?'

No hands up

Pupil: 'What does that mean?'

Teacher tells and asks again

Pupil offers: 'Cinq sours', and asks: 'How do I say no brothers?'

Another offers: 'trois frères'

Pupil: 'How do you say no brothers and sisters?'

Teacher tells

Pupil repeats, sounds like: 'Tsche n'ai pas..'

Teacher moves on to revising animals

I volunteer: 'J'ai deux chats'

Teacher: 'Combien de chats a-t-elle?'

Pupil: 'She has two cats'.

Teacher: 'Comment s'appellent-ils?', 'What does that mean?'

Pupil: 'I've got a dog'.

Teacher asks: 'Who remembers French for 'rabbit'?'

Three children do.

Teacher moves on to game where pupils pretend to be an animal in front of class

Teacher asks: 'Qu'est-ce que c'est?'

Pupil answers: 'A dog' although class was told to say the animals in French

Pupils seem to enjoy this

Teacher moves on to introducing classroom objects: French native speaker models

Chorus class repetitions

Teacher asks: 'C'est un/une...?' with flashcard not matching

Pupils answer: 'Non, c'est un/une...'

Not many remember the items

Teacher moves on to cassette and worksheet

Pupils are supposed to hold up the classroom item mentioned on the tape.

Most copy me

Teacher writes 'un/une' on chalkboard and pupils are supposed to offer words to fit gender e.g. 'un style', 'une règle'

Teacher asks: 'What does 'un/une' mean?'

Pupil volunteers: 'I have'

Not one of them can guess!

Finally a boy suggests 'masculine' and 'feminine'

I ask him how he knew the concepts. He tells me he speaks Kurdish at home, English is his second language and he goes to Chinese lessons on a Saturday. He also tells me that he has a French dictionary at home which he studies regularly and that he 'listens a lot' in lessons.

### Lesson Five

Teacher asks around class: 'Comment t'appelles-tu?'

The penny seems to have dropped at last

Pupils introduce each other: 'Il/Elle s'appelle...'

Most get it right

Teacher: 'Who can ask another question?'

Pupil: 'Quel âge a-t-elle?'

Pupil answers: 'Elle a 10 ans'

Teacher asks: 'Quel âge as-tu?'

One pupil asks: 'Do you mean where I live?'

Another girl offers: 'Elle a j'ai 10 ans'

Teacher: 'Où habites-tu?'

Pupil: 'J'habite à ...'

Teacher asks: 'Où habit-elle?'

No answers come forward

Teacher uses native speaker to model both questions and answers again

Many get confused between il/elle again

Teacher moves on to revising animals with flashcards: 'Qu'est-ce que c'est?'

Plenty of hands up but few actually remember.

Choral repetition of all the animals

Teacher moves on to cassette work and last week's worksheet

Pupils need to recognise the animal spoken about. Most get something right.

### Lesson Six

Teacher revises: 'Comment t'appelles-tu?'

Pupils answer and pass the question around the class

Lots of what sounds like 'Tshe m'appelle...'

The Kurdish boy asks if they can change the question

Teacher agrees, boy asks: 'Où habites-tu?'

Pupil answers correctly: 'J'habite à...'

Teacher asks: 'Who can introduce someone?'

Kurdish boy turns to the girl next to him: 'Elle s'appelle...'

Teacher moves on to animals. Children adopt an animal and act it out. Class guesses. Not many remember the names of the animals and genders are generally forgotten.

## Group Two

### Lesson One

This group seems generally better behaved and more able to listen attentively than previous groups. Class teacher reckons it is the best group in terms of social skills that he has taught for many years.

They are used to putting their hands up and do not shout out much

One pupil asks for permission to get out of chair to get pencil sharpened

Lesson in English on France and French speaking countries

Pupils locate France and French speaking countries on map

Identify French towns and rivers

We ask them to write down 5 things they know about France.

Some do not seem to know anything, the world cup comes up, 'Paris is the capital', 'they have the Eiffel Tower', 'they have lots of wine and art', 'they speak French' are the most common answers, one child reckons the Statue of Liberty is in France

### Lesson Two

Teacher introduces greetings in French, 'Bonjour, ça va?', 'Merci, ça va bien/ mal/ comme ci, comme ça', with thumbs support

Native speakers, Arabic Farsi, Portugues, Hindi, Spanish, Somali, Senegalese, Tamil, French, Patois give models of how greetings are carried out in their

language. Pupils repeat each greeting on a choral and individual basis around the class.

This lesson always goes down well. Pupils seem to feel very positively about having their languages 'recognised'. Lots of smiles and lots of attention, everyone seems happy to repeat and have a go, no laughing at somebody else's efforts.

### Lesson Three

Teacher rehearses 'Comment t'appelles tu' asking around the class. Few put their hands up but rest cottons on and most are eventually able to reply in a full sentence.

Teacher moves on to 'quel âge as tu?'

5 children volunteer correct answers

Teacher moves on to tape and worksheet on names and ages

Everyone is silent and attentive as teacher plays tape

Pupils are to identify the names said on tape with help of worksheet where names are given. Most can contribute

Teacher asks pupils to turn the sheet to identify names without help. Now that answers are based on listening only very few children attempt to have a go

One boy starts and keeps disrupting, is sent to a separate desk in corner

Some more begin to get restless, teacher needs to reprimand some

Pupils listen to tape again to match names with ages

Not all are as attentive as they were first time round.

I walk around and notice that only few manage to link age with name, majority copies from those few who do know. Some girls are making additional notes in a note book.

Teacher tells pupils how to wish somebody a happy birthday in French e.g 'Bon Anniversaire'.

One boy, Portuguese mother tongue, comments: 'Sir, in that way she's saying in English 'good birthday'.

Teacher checks answers, some have messed up sheet completely, most want to answer correctly but need me to prompt



Class now much less attentive, teacher senses restlessness and announces a game which is greeted with a big 'YES'

Teacher says that they are not allowed to speak English, this is greeted with 'oh no'

To play the game pupils have to ask around class for people's names and their ages as well as tell give their own name and age.

Most do not remember how to ask these two basic question or answer.

I repeat several times and get them to practice but a few minutes later they have already forgotten again.

Teacher stops and asks class how to ask somebody's name in French: they don't remember

When they start moving around again one child's 'comment t'appelles tu' is answered by another child with 'huit'

'Quel âge as tu' is answered with 'je mappelle' by a number of children.

They have lots of fun, are enthusiastic, enjoy the activity. One boy comments: 'miss the time is going really fast' and one girl comments: 'miss didn't time go quickly'. Much social learning and 'getting on' with people but French was very weak.

#### Lesson Four

I'm greeted in French pupils seem very enthusiastic and ready

Teacher says: 'Moups the shape of O, ears back'

Whole class seems attentive

Teacher: 'Let's see what you remember, ça va?'

Mumbles from across the class

Teacher: 'Let's assume you are all well, ça va?'

Class: 'Oui, ça va bien'

Teacher: 'Comment t'appelles-tu?'

3 hands go up, most do not seem to remember what the question means.

After the first few correct responses the rest of the class cottons on.

Teacher asks class to choose the name of a French footballer

More boys' hands go up than girls'

Pupil asks teacher: 'What's the question again?'

Girl asks me how to ask somebody's name. This is the same girl I practised this with 3/4 times last week

Pupils practise question and answer in pairs

Teacher moves on to next question: 'Quel âge as-tu?'

Class repeats in chorus

4 hands go up

One girl offers: 'once' another: 'Je onze ans'

Teacher: 'Not 'Je' but 'J'ai'

Class repeats a series of phrases with different ages

Lots of 'Tschai' for J'ai

Written explanation on the board might have helped to clarify the difference between 'J'ai' and 'Je'

Class starts to lose concentration

Teacher asks: 'Quel âge as-tu?'

Pupil answers: 'Je m'appelle...'

One girl, same as last week, refers to the notes she made and her worksheets

Pupil offers: 'Tschai onze ans',

Teacher ignores pronunciation error: 'Très bien'

Teacher moves on to: 'Où habites-tu?'

I offer: 'J'habite à Acton'

Class picks up what this means

Same boy as last week sent to corner for disrupting

Class works out that 'J'habite', means 'I live'

Teacher goes on to worksheet

Another boy is asked to stand up in corner for misbehaving

On worksheet there are children registering at a youth hostel

Teacher asks what a youth hostel is

Suggestions from children: a city, a place you go when you get lost, a mental hospital, a place where you can stay like a B and B

Teacher explains concept of youth hostel

Some seemed to have switched off, much off- task behaviour, swinging on chairs, chatting, fiddling, covering heads in shirts

Teacher moves on to tape with worksheet

Nationalities in French on worksheet are easily worked out by pupils

One boy is sent out for telling a girl to shut up

Pupils tick ages in boxes of the children registering at the youth hostel

One girl starts ticking anything before the tape is played

Many cannot remember the numbers up to 16

Some do not know how to tick

Teacher checks responses: 'Quel âge a-t-il?'

Pupil replies: 'Britannique'

Teacher asks for difference between 'tu/il' as in 'Quel âge a-t-il?'

Pupil offers: 'Where does he come from'

Teacher: 'Quel âge a-t-elle?'

Pupil offers: 'What's her name'

Some copy answers from worksheet although they have been told that cards on worksheet contain factual mistakes. Some cannot copy correctly.

The same pupil as last week asks me how to ask somebody their name, this is the third time she asks, when I point this out to her she tells me she cannot remember.

Teacher explains masculine/feminine endings e.g. australien, australienne, canadien, canadienne

Girl writes 'britannienne', although this is wrong she clearly has done some thinking

Girl who always makes reference to her notes copies everything teacher writes on blackboard. Her neighbour starts doing the same.

Teacher writes several sample sentences on board: e.g. 'Quel âge a-t-il? Il a 5 ans', 'Où habite-il?' and asks: 'How does the answer start?'

Only 2 can work this out

The same with 'elle', only a couple can make the analogy.

Teacher does final check in English: 'Comment t'appelles-tu? What does this mean?'

Pupil offers: 'How old are you'

## Lesson Five

Teacher: 'stop fiddeling otherwise we waste lots of time, close your books, half of the battle of learning a language is listening, if you don't listen you won't learn'

All are now quiet

Teacher: Quel âge a-t-elle?

Pupil: 'How old is he?'

Teacher repeats: 'Quel âge a-t-elle?'

Pupil: 'J'ai...'

Another pupil helps out: 'Elle a...'

Teacher: 'What does 'il' mean?'

Pupil: 'He'

Teacher: 'Quel âge as-tu?'

Pupil answers correctly: 'J'ai...'

Teacher: 'Quel âge as-tu?'

One answers: 'A-t-il j'ai onze ans'.

Teacher introduces 'Voici + name + age'

Class practises introducing their neighbour

Pupil to me: 'Miss I forgot, what is it?'

Boy introduces boy: 'Voici...elle a....'

Teacher: 'Who remembers how to say where you live?'

3 hands go up

Two boys next to me do not remember

One asks me: 'Miss how do you remember, how do you keep talking, I don't remember.'

Pupil asks me twice how to say 'he' and then produces: 'Il j'ai onze ans.'

Class getting restless

One pupil offers: Voici...elle a... elle habite... gets it all right

Teacher prompts girl after she produced 'elle a onze ans' with 'où habite-elle?'

Girl produces: 'Où habite elle habite à Ealing'

Teacher moves on to introduce classroom objects all the feminines then all the masculines

Class does choral and individual repetition and practice

Teacher: 'Who remembers the word for.. ' and shows object

Very few do remember

One boy produces 'une door'

'Une tschaise' is produced frequently

Teacher asks what they think 'une' means

Pupil offers: 'One'

Another offers: 'a'

Teacher reminds that some words began with 'une' and some with 'un'

Asks what they think 'un' means

Pupil suggests 'one' again despite earlier clarification, does not make logical conclusion

Teacher asks if anyone knows why it is 'une'... but 'un'...

Pupil: 'un' means 'one', 'une' means 'is'

Pupil: 'un' is short for 'une'

Pupil: 'it's 'un' because the word starts with a 'c'

Pupil: 'one is masculine the other feminine'

I ask this girl how she knew. Tells me she attended primary school in France for two years where she was taught these concepts.

Class moves on to worksheet where they listen to objects being named on cassette and tick box for either 'un' or 'une'

Some do not understand what to do despite explanation in English.

Some get all the answers right

Some clearly do not hear the difference or do not listen and simply guess.

Class gets restless and teacher tells whole class off for not listening

Suggests that what should have taken 15 minutes took 45.

After telling off all listen in silence.

When I check answers the same children keep volunteering

Pupils copy masculine and feminine words from board, grouped on two differently coloured sheets, they seem to enjoy copying.

## Lesson Six

Teacher revises names, ages and where pupils live at the start of the lesson

There is complete confusion between 'tu', 'il' and 'elle' again

The same children as last week ask me yet again 'How do I ask...'

Give them example: 'Je m'appelle Madame Poole' to which a girl responds

'Is this saying 'I live..?'

One boy asks: 'Où habite-elle?' One boy responds: 'Où habite à Hammersmith'

And this is after several weeks of practice.

Teacher moves on to introducing classroom objects: 'J'ai un livre'

Choral repetition and individual repetition follows with different objects

Teacher moves on to: 'As-tu un/une...'

Pupils are supposed to respond: 'Oui, j'ai un/une...'

Most manage to do this although it is likely that many are simply repeating what's been said before.

Teacher introduces: 'Je n'ai pas de...' and makes use of chalkboard for this

Teacher moves on to worksheet and cassette

This worksheet has a number of classroom items on it and children are supposed to cross out those identified on the tape. I move around to see how they do

The great majority copies from the person at the table who gets it right.

## Lesson Seven

This lesson is on revision of numbers as a few children are absent

Pupils practise numbers and play number games

Numbers are on tape and pupils write these down

Some still struggle with the numbers and leave many blank

Teacher checks: Pupils read out numbers in French, one pupil writes numbers on board. All in all there are 16 numbers between one and twenty. It practically took the whole lesson to explain what they need to do, to listen to these 16 numbers on the tape three times, to check what they had done with one child reading out the French number and one writing the figure on the board and then a whole class check to see how many they had got right and to practise the numbers again.

**APPENDIX E**  
**Learning French - Questionnaire**

Name.....Boy.....Girl.....Age.....Year Group.....  
Languages I can speak.....

A I have enjoyed learning French because.....

B I have not really enjoyed learning French because.....

A I would like to learn more French because.....

B I don't want to learn any more French because.....

A I find French easy because.....

B I find French difficult because.....

A I like speaking French because.....

B I don't really like speaking French because.....

A I would have liked to do more reading because.....

B I'm glad we did not do more reading because.....

A I would have liked to do more writing because.....

B I'm glad we did not do more writing because.....

A I would have liked to do more homework because.....

B I'm glad we didn't get more homework because.....

The things I liked most were.....  
because.....

The things I liked least were.....  
because.....

What I found easy was.....  
because.....

What I found difficult was.....  
because.....

Put a tick against the things you find easy in French and a cross against those you find more difficult:

remembering words in French.....

remembering sentences in French.....

saying words in French.....

saying whole sentences in French.....

copying things down in French.....

reading in French.....

understanding the teacher speaking French.....

understanding people on the tape speaking French.....

asking questions in French.....

answering the teacher's questions in French.....

Write down some of the things you have learned to do in French.....

.....  
.....

Name some things you would like to find out about French-speaking people or the countries where French is spoken.....

.....  
.....

Name some things you would like to be able to do or say in French.....

.....  
.....  
.....

What I look forward to most in my French lessons at secondary school is.....  
because.....

What I look forward to least in my French lessons at secondary school is.....  
because.....

If you could choose any language to learn at secondary school which one would you choose and why.....

MERCI - Thank you for your help -



## **APPENDIX F**

### **Findings from Questionnaire School Two**

#### **Girls 6R**

##### **Six girls said that they enjoyed learning French:**

it will help me more in high school

it is a great help in highschool

it was a new language

I can say lots of things in French

It is great fun and I would like to go to France.

##### **Two said they did not enjoy it:**

the words for me were quite hard

it is to hard

##### **Five said they would like to learn more French:**

it is fun

is good language

it is quite enjoyable

it's interesting

I enjoy learning different languages

##### **Five did not want to learn any more:**

it was difficult I want to learn something new

I don't think it is important because I don't live in France

The words are to hard to learn

I don't know some of the words

( the girl who said he wanted to learn more because French 'is good language' also said she did not want to elarn any more because it was difficult)

##### **Five said they found French easy:**

teacher helps

I was born in France

the teacher explains a word very well

some words are like my language (Portuguese speaker)

if you really get into it you find it fun

**Four said they found French difficult:**

we move from different topics too fast and I don't get enough time to understand  
I don't know some of the words  
some words are very hard for me  
it has different word and number  
to me, the way you describe the words sound weird

**Six said they liked speaking French:**

it's a very common language that almost most people know it  
it is a good language to learn  
because is very nice language  
I want to learn french so I could learn  
it had a lot thing so that means that I speak a languages  
when a new person come... I can speak it

**Three said they did not really like speaking in French:**

I'm quite shy  
at home I don't have anyone to speak it too  
Maybe my character isn't really focused on it and just wants to speak another language

**Six said they would have liked to do more reading:**

I gone to know french  
I could learn some words  
it would have made my reading skills in french easier  
so we know what it means  
it will help me with spellings  
I always wanted to learn french

**Two said they were glad they did not do more reading:**

I find it hard to read  
It wasn't exactly 'EASY'. It was just as bad with accent.

**Five said they would have liked to do more writing:**

then we will know how to spell them  
It was alright. It had a very powerful attraction.

I think the writing is very nice  
so I can understand it  
then I would be able to spell good in french and understand the words more

**Three said they were glad they did not do any more writing:**

I get confused very fast  
I do not know how to do writing in french  
I can't spell a word in french

**Five said they would have liked to do more homework:**

I will learn more  
It was fun and I enjoyed writing about myself. I liked all homework  
then I could study the words and become better at french  
it will help me  
I could learn some words  
One girl did not get beyond this question on the questionnaire

**Three said that they were glad they did not get more homework:**

Sometimes I don't understand what's going on in class so I find homework hard  
it is hard  
we might have some other homework and we might not be able to get it done

**The things they liked most:**

learning sentences it was better than learning words but I found it hard to remember them  
listening to the tape recorder they speak nice and clearly (response from the girl who was born in France)  
talking/writing about myself, or someone else. I quite liked the "je" and the "Elle a" in it all. I liked it all.  
the games and listening to the recorder  
I like to speak and write in french  
playing the games and pronouncing the words it is great fun and it is important to learn french  
French I enjoyed listening some of the things  
when we had to find out how old they were it was very funny

**The things they liked least:**

french because some of the French words are abet easy for but some are hard for me  
when I couldn't remember a word and I was asked because it would be embarrassing  
and I am a very shy person  
speaking French because it would be very fun  
listening to tapes because I found it hard to understand them

**What they found easy:**

actually everything because I know most of it (girl born in France)  
talking at he same time with the classbecause I felt more confident  
numbers in french because I had to tack time  
pronouncing the words because it is very easy and some of the words are funny  
speaking a little bit of French because I would like to  
speaking french and remembering the words because it's not much different to my  
language (the girl called her language 'Patois, broken French)  
the listening to the tape. And I found this easy because I could then be explained to  
fluently.

**What they found difficult:**

answering sentences because I got most words mixed up  
nothing because I know a lot of French (girl born in France)  
the understanding of it all. Like listening to the teacher speak in french because he  
wrote and spoke it pretty fast  
pronouncing some numbers in french because the way the teacher pronounced it I  
sometime don't understand  
not being able to hear all the information on the tape because it wasn't very clear and  
there were somethings we hadn't learnt yet

French because when the teacher say somethink I found some words difficult

|                                         |                   |                      |
|-----------------------------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| remembering words in French             | 5 found this easy | 2 found it difficult |
| remembering sentences in French         | 3 found this easy | 4 found it difficult |
| saying words in French                  | 6 found this easy | 1 found it difficult |
| saying whole sentences in French        | 4 found this easy | 3 found it difficult |
| copying things down in French           | 7 found this easy | 0 found it difficult |
| reading in French                       | 1 found this easy | 6 found it difficult |
| understanding the teacher speak French  | 3 found this easy | 4 found it difficult |
| understanding people on the tape        | 4 found this easy | 3 found it difficult |
| asking questions in French              | 6 found this easy | 1 found it difficult |
| answering teacher's questions in French | 5 found this easy | 2 found it difficult |

**When asked to name some of the things they learned in French children listed:**

how to say numbers, what is your name and the answer, what's masculine and feminine

numbers, say some words and to ask some questions

writing in french, speaking in french, reading and listening in french

saying good morning and saying hello

how to say sentences numbers and words

say our names, where we live our age and to ask people questions

to say number to say words in some of the question

**Asked what they would like to find out about French speaking people or countries where French is spoken:**

I don't no

it is spoken is Frans

I would like to ask the French people if french was first spoken in their country and

how did some west indies know how to speak french?

I would like to find out about the pronounciation of french words and more numbers

I don't want to learn french an more

I wouldn't

how to make it easier

I would like to know almost everything

**Asked to name some of the things they would like to to be able to do or say in French:**

I would like to say harder sentences in french

I don't want to take on French

Talk in French I don't wan't learn french any more. I wan't to learn Spanish

I would like to speak French fluently

I would like to be able to talk fluently in french and understand

I would like to speak a lot of French

I don't no what to do

**Asked what they were looking forward to at secondary school:**

to no everything because I don't no what to say

speaking it because I would like to no more

speaking to the teacher in french because it would make me understand and  
co-operate with the teacher more  
doing my best because I'm not very good at french  
I won't be learning it because I'm learning Spanish & German  
Learning more words because I find learning words easy  
reading because I forget how to read some harder words

**Asked what they were looking forward to least at secondary school:**

learning numbers because I already know them  
learning sentences because I find it confusing  
doing too much homework because I can't handle it well  
having a lot of homework because you may have a lot of homework from the other  
lessons  
speaking to the teacher because it would be fun  
I don't because no what to say

**Asked if they could choose any language to learn at secondary school which one  
would they choose and why:**

I would like to do some German  
French and spanish because my mum speaks it and it sounds really nice  
I would choose \*french because it's a little easier to learn than some other languages  
Spanish beacuse spanish is easy and French is a hard  
Italien  
I would choose Punjabi because I can already understand it and I think I would speak it  
easily  
I don't think you should stick with one language because it often gets boring. A little bit  
of everything is fun.  
I would choose French and German because my cousin speaks German and I want to  
talk to her and French because I want to proove to everyone that I was born in France.

## **Boys 6R**

### **All of the boys said that they enjoyed learning French:**

it is a knew language for me  
It is fun lerning french (2)  
it is one of the best langua...in the world  
I do like it  
it is a new language and it fun  
it is something different  
I like to learn new languages  
I like to lain three lan...  
it is a fane(?) lesou

### **Nine boys said they would like to learn more French:**

I might use it wen I'm older  
I can speak to my brother  
to speak in french and it is fun  
because when I go to France I can speak it  
when I go to France I can speak  
it is good  
when I go to france I can speak French  
I want to spek French  
One boy left this section blank

### **Seven said they found French easy:**

portuges is quit semeler  
I know how to prnoces (pronounce?) in French  
some of the words are like english  
I know how to prnou..(pronounce?) some of the words in French  
it is easy to easy  
you get help to understand  
we start of with easy work then hard work

**Three said they found French difficult:**

I can't remember words

French is not my languages

pronouns (pronunciation?) is hard

**Eight said they liked speaking French:**

it is fun (fun?) to speak a new language

it is fun (2)

it is fun and it is a good language

it is good to speak French

it is a great speciality

because it is a nice language to learn

I can communicate (communicate?) with a friend

Two boys left this section blank

**Seven said they would have liked to do more reading:**

so I could read in French

I could read French books

I could have read French books

I like reading it very funny

so I can get over the difficulties

I can improve my reading speed

It will help me learn

**Two said they were glad they did not do more reading:**

I don't know how to read in French

Two boys left this section blank

**Six said they would have liked to do more writing:**

I could like to write in French

I could write in French as well as speaking

it is fun to do

so I can get over the difficulties

I could improve my writing

I'll learn how to write more



**Three said they were glad they did not do any more writing:**

I did not like writing

I don't like to write in french

I cant spell french

One boy left this section blank

**Five said they would have liked to do more homework:**

It takes my spear time

I could do mor work

it will help me lern more

I could learn at home as well

I like do it

Two boys left this section blank

**Three said that they were glad they did not get more homework:**

I don't like homework

there hard to do

I travale (travel?) to my family a lote

**The things the boys liked most:**

playing games because it was fone (fun?)

(?)...in French because when I go to FRANCE I can speak French

asking other people question in french because it was helpping me talk to other people  
in french

getting into groups because we can exchange our ideas

doing some activitys because they were fun and we could move around

the France 98 world cup I like do best because it's very fun

about le coupe du monde because it is very good

counting the french numbers because I could count

I liked the games speaking french, writing french because I can learn a lote more

**The things the boys liked least:**

singing because I don't know how to sing in French

I don't know

I don't know

Seven boys did not mention anything under this section

**What they found easy:**

listening because I understand some things

listening to the tape because I don't know

saying hello and goodbye and how I'm feeling because it makes me confident

listening and filling in some worksheets because they were like a revision of what we learned

counting in French

the games and writing French because it wasn't hard

**What the boys found difficult:**

writing because the letters were confusing

pronouns (pronunciation?) because it is hard

I don't know

asking different questions to boys and girls

saying long sentences (sentences?) in French because we had to say some difficult words

speaking French because some people know how to speak French

speaking

|                                        |                   |                      |
|----------------------------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| remembering words in French            | 7 found this easy | 3 found it difficult |
| remembering sentences in French        | 2 found this easy | 8 found it difficult |
| saying words in French                 | 9 found this easy | 1 found it difficult |
| saying whole sentences in French       | 2 found this easy | 8 found it difficult |
| copying things down in French          | 8 found this easy | 2 found it difficult |
| reading in French                      | 4 found this easy | 6 found it difficult |
| understanding the teacher speak French | 4 found this easy | 6 found it difficult |
| understanding people on the tape       | 3 found this easy | 7 found it difficult |
| asking questions in French             | 2 found this easy | 8 found it difficult |
| answering the teacher speak French     | 3 found this easy | 7 found it difficult |

**When asked to name some of the things they learned in French the boys listed:**

about boys and girls

we learned how to count in french (2)

cant remember

how to ask what your name is and numbers

we learn answering the teacher in french

saying the names of objects in french

**Asked what they would like to find out about French speaking people or countries where French is spoken:**

I would like to know how many countries speak French

I don't know

can I play football with you I would like to learn how to speak the language

I would like to speak French

**Asked to name some of the things they would like to be able to do or say in French:**

I could count in french

don't know (2)

I would like to speak french completely

How are you, how do you do, what class (class?) you're in

I would like to work up a conversation (conversation?) in French

**Asked what they were looking forward to at secondary school:**

sport because then I can help people with it

telling the teacher what I learned (learned?) because I would remember some important things

I don't know

anything because it is a new thing

speaking a language(?)

speak in french

**Asked what they were looking forward to least at secondary school:**

homework because it is very hard

I don't know (2)

**Asked if they could choose any language to learn at secondary school which one would they choose and why:**

German because it is most complict...(complicated?)

I don't know (2)

French because it is easier

I would choose Franch because it is fun

Greek becouse some of my famely only speak Greek

Italy because Ive liked speke Italien for a long time

I would choose Italyan because it's nice

### **Boys 6J**

**Seven of the boys said that they enjoyed learning French:**

it is interesting

it wasn't that hard and it was enjoyable

because I like lening languages

I like the accent

I like saying French words

It's very usefull on holiday

it can be funny for English (French native speaker)

**Three said they did not enjoy learning French:**

it's boring

its boring

it is a hard language

**Seven boys said they would like to learn more French:**

It is a bit fun learning French

It's very interesting

It's a nice language

becarse I like it

it's a good language to know becace people go there a lot

so when I go to France I can speak the language

I would like to learn another language

**Two said they did not want to learn any more French:**

I do not want to learn lots of French words  
it's too hard

**Only two boys said they found French easy:**

I speak French at home with my parents  
The words are similar to English

**Seven said they found French difficult:**

I had to remember lots of French words  
It's my first time learning  
I do not remember anything  
The way we had to pronounce the words and remember the words  
how it's pronounced  
it has some difficult words  
it's a completely new language to me

**Six said they liked speaking French:**

it is interesting  
I can practice it  
it is my language  
I'd like to learn three languages  
It's a well known language  
if some French boy was talking I understand

**Three said they did not really like speaking French:**

it sounds kind of dull  
it is boring  
The words are hard to say

**Seven said they would have liked to do more reading:**

I can learn French  
so I could pronounce the words  
I could have learnt more  
I like reading in French

It is interesting

I want to get used to French

I like reading

**Two said they were glad they did not do more reading:**

The words are hard to read

I prefer reading in English

**Six said they would have liked to do more writing:**

I like writing

It is easy

I like writing in French

I could have learnt more

I want to know how to write in French

I can practice what to write

**Four said they were glad they did not do any more writing:**

I kept asking Sir for the spellings

It looks hard

It is hard to write French words

because I do not now how to spell in French or write

**Six said they would have liked to do more homework:**

it is good for your education

It will give me more French

I could have learnt more

I like to do homework

it was easy

I like French homework

**Three said that they were glad they did not get more homework:**

I can't read French

I didn't have time to do it

I do not like doing French homework

**The things the boys liked most:**

How to talk in an different way

singing in french because it was a bit easy

the singing and the homework because the singing was fun and the homework was good

the number...because it was fun and easy

talking to each other because it was good fun to learn that way

speaking or learning French, being able to read the words because it's a nice language and I can say words properly

french puzzles because I'm not really sure

saying nise words in french because it make people happy

**The things the boys liked least:**

riteing French words because they were hard to rite

doing things that were to hard to understand because I got presured into doing it and I got it ll wrong

spelling because they were hard to spell

the writing and reading from a book because it was difficult reading French

reading in Freanch because it wasent very hard (?)

doing homework because I would not understand

**What they found easy:**

the read because it was just to read the words

speaking in French because it wasent very hard

the homework because it was...

speaking Frence a bit because I soundid realy funny

The very basics like bonjour because I knew most of them

the words because they are similar to English

counting because I'm not sure

**What the boys found difficult:**

saying french word because the are hard to say

to spell in fre... because it would be in a different way

reading in french because of the letters

the singing, reading and writing because it was difficult to say the words and spell

writing because I spellt some words roning(?)

the bits I had no idea about because I couldn't pronounce them

the writing I have to copy from the board because it is pretty hard

learning how to speak in a conservation because it was hard to remember every thing

|                                        |                   |                      |
|----------------------------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| remembering words in French            | 6 found this easy | 3 found it difficult |
| remembering sentences in French        | 3 found this easy | 6 found it difficult |
| saying words in French                 | 8 found this easy | 1 found it difficult |
| saying whole sentences in French       | 2 found this easy | 6 found it difficult |
| copying things down in French          | 7 found this easy | 2 found it difficult |
| reading in French                      | 2 found this easy | 7 found it difficult |
| understanding the teacher speak French | 2 found this easy | 7 found it difficult |
| understanding people on the tape       | 4 found this easy | 5 found it difficult |
| asking questions in French             | 6 found this easy | 3 found it difficult |
| answering the teacher's questions      | 5 found this easy | 4 found it difficult |

**When asked to name some of the things they learned in French the boys listed:**

spell, to read, wright and speaking in freach a little

We have learned to say things in French

sing a song, read, speak in french, count nos 1 to 20 to great to write in french to read

in french and to sing in french

have a conversation to learn things about people

count and speak a little

I learnt how to answer questions and how to ask questions

how old are you

hellow buy rubar bag book...(?)

**Asked what they would like to find out about French speaking people or countries where French is spoken:**

How many difrent languages are spoken in france

I'm not sure if somalian spoke french

I would like to know why they eat snails

I'd like to know how there lives have changed from the past

How many difrent Town are thaere in France

I would like to find out what a French class is like

I would like to now how was the first france person



**Asked to name some of the things they would like to be able to do or say in**

**French:**

I would like to say (I like you) or your friend

How are you? What is your age? I live at, Good morning, Good Afternoon

I would like to read and write in French and to speak French

I'd like to say everything in French

I would like to speak good French

Dance and sing

I would like to Read in French and speak a lot of French

I would like to say how much, thanks, you well ...(?) and please

**Asked what they were looking forward to at secondary school:**

the games because we will have fun

my teacher because he or her will be teaching me spelling

how to talk to someone on the phone because it is very useful

learning to pronounce words because I want to learn properly

just learning because I'm sure it will be interesting and fun

how they speak French because if I can understand it well

the teacher because I hope he's a funny one

**Asked what they were looking forward to least at secondary school:**

saying things in French because it is hard to say

speaking in French because I keep forgetting the words

reading in French because reading in French to me is hard

the homework because it will be hard

saying words out loud because I might not say them properly

how to count because I know how to

spelling because it is hard

Howright because it is boring

**Asked if they could choose any language to learn at secondary school which one would they choose and why:**

because my friends speak it

Portuguese because most of my friends speak in that language

Italian because I like Italian things

French I'd like to learn another language  
French because I hope to go there a lot in the future  
French because I liked French better than the other languages  
Italian because I like the way they pronounce their words  
I would choose football because I like football

### **Girls 6C**

#### **Six of the girls said that they enjoyed learning French:**

It's good to learn a new language  
I liked talking to each other in French  
It is a brilliant language  
It would be good having to know 3 languages  
It is fun to learn other language  
Learning a new language is interesting

#### **Four said they did not enjoy learning French:**

I don't remember most of it  
It's hard to learn a different language  
It was hard to learn  
I don't see the point of learning it

#### **Five girls said they would like to learn more French:**

French is a nice language and I want to speak fluently  
Then I can understand French people  
I would like to speak to other people in French  
I would like to go to France  
I want to go to France on holiday and speak French there

#### **Four said they did not want to learn any more French:**

it is a bit hard  
I thought it was hard to remember words  
I find it hard speaking and pronouncing words  
I know I'll never need to use it

**Only two girls said they found French easy:**

most of my family knows a bit of French

some French words sound similar to English ones

**Seven said they found French difficult:**

it's hard remembering it and with pronouncing it

it is hard trying to say and pronounce words of a different language

the words are different

it's hard to understand

I kept getting mixed up with words and sentences

sometimes I forget the words

I didn't say anything as a sentence

**Six said they liked speaking French:**

it is a fascinating language

some words sound funny

it's a nice language

it's fun speaking French with others

I like the accent

It is nice to learn

**Three said they did not really like speaking French:**

I sometimes forget what I'm saying

hard pronouncing words

I can't pronounce the words properly

**Three said they would have liked to do more reading:**

It is nice to read

then I could speak and get better in knowing how to read French

I learn things and I also wanted to speak French

**Six said they were glad they did not do more reading:**

I didn't know what I was reading

I prefer speaking French

not understandable

I didn't understand what they ment  
ther is no point in reading if you don't understand  
There is not much point in reading something that I didn't understand

**Three said they would have liked to do more writing:**

I would of found out how to write in rench  
Then I could know how to read write and speak French  
I thought that was the most interesting part

**Six said they were glad they did not do any more writing:**

The same as on the top but with writing (There is not much point in reading something that I didn't understand)  
I didn' enjoy witing  
Funny figures  
I find it hard and prefer speaking  
I know I'll never have to write in French  
it's hard to wright in French

**Two said they would have liked to do more homework:**

It gave me something to do at home  
It teaches me things

**Seven said that they were glad they did not get more homework:**

I find it hard without help  
I didn't have time whene I've got more  
Sometimes I can't be botherd  
I forgot when I got home  
I find it hard with no help  
I prefer doing French with a teacher  
I'm busy enough at home with English and Arabic homework

**The things the girls liked most:**

numbers because they were easy  
playing bingo and communicating because they are really fun  
learning numbers because they were quite easy

speaking French, play bingo because it was very fun  
listening to the tape because we could hear it then write it down  
to know how to speak French because it is fun  
learning French numbers because I did not get confused with it all  
our folders (folders?) a bit of homework because I liked it

### **The things the girls liked least**

when we had too much work on the tape because I thought it was hard to fill it  
learning the un's and une's because I didn't know the difference  
the sheets of homework because I didn't have a book or tape to help me we just had to  
think and may be get it wrong  
drawing things  
writing or copying down French because it was difficult  
learning sentences because I forgot what they meant  
work with tape because they were hard to understand  
saying where do you live ? or how old are you? because I get them mixed up

### **What they found easy:**

saying hello because it's not a sentence  
numbers because I already knew them  
speaking French and remembering it because the words were easy to remember  
learning numbers because that's the first thing we learnt  
writing French and reading French because it is very easy  
copying of the board because we could do the figures properly  
how to say some easy words because I can remember them  
learning objects and numbers because it was fun and interesting  
when we worked on the sheet because it was easy to work on

### **What the girls found difficult:**

how to pronounce (pronounce?) the words because it's hard  
singing songs  
because I didn't understand the words  
how to spell and how to write because it's got different punctuation in writing than in  
English  
singing some songs because you had to use your tongue a lot

sentences because I forgot what they meant  
 singular words because they were easy to forget  
 the other things. They were sentences like were do you live? But I do know some  
 colours in French  
 writing or copying down because I'm not used to writing French

|                                        |                   |                      |
|----------------------------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| remembering words in French            | 6 found this easy | 3 found it difficult |
| remembering sentences in French        | 7 found this easy | 2 found it difficult |
| saying words in French                 | 8 found this easy | 1 found it difficult |
| saying whole sentences in French       | 4 found this easy | 5 found it difficult |
| copying things down in French          | 7 found this easy | 2 found it difficult |
| reading in French                      | 0 found this easy | 9 found it difficult |
| understanding the teacher speak French | 3 found this easy | 6 found it difficult |
| understanding people on the tape       | 3 found this easy | 6 found it difficult |
| asking questions in French             | 4 found this easy | 5 found it difficult |
| answering the teacher's questions      | 4 found this easy | 5 found it difficult |

**When asked to name some of the things they learned in French the girls listed:**

i have learned to say hello, goodbye, etc.  
 count, ask questions, say countires, family names and sing a french song  
 I have learnt numbers  
 count up to 20, sing a song, communicate and talk about ourselves  
 say colours, a few farm animal (I forgot most off those) hello, goodbye and sentences (I  
 forgot 2 and there were 3)  
 I have learnd to say easy things  
 say sentences, say hello and goodbye, count and sing  
 Bonzer, (Bonjour?) I know lots

**Asked what they would like to find out about French speaking people or  
 countries where French is spoken:**

I don't know  
 In diffent parts of France do they speak different languages? Do any oyther countries  
 speak French?  
 I would like to find out how to read french  
 how hard they found learning French and if they like their language  
 I'd like to know what other countries speak french  
 is French a hard language to sepak and when you earn ferench do you find it easy to  
 learn other languages

**Asked to name some of the things they would like to to be able to do or say in**

**French:**

I love you, can I have some money, Have you got money, are you OK etc.

I don't care

I would like to sing songs in french which are not hard to learn

I would like to be able speak French fluently

Talk write and maybe sing a bit

I would like to know how write and how to read French

I want to say 'I can't speak french' because I can't

I don't understand the question (question?)

I would like to speak, read, write, sing and ask questions

**Asked what they were looking forward to at secondary school:**

speaking because I can ask my mum

learning French because I communicate

singing because I enjoy it

I hope I'll improve because then I'll be able to speak french

talking to my friends in French

my french teacher because he was really nice and kind

learning difficult things because I'd like to speak fluently

speaking fluently because French is a lovely language to learn

**Asked what they were looking forward to least at secondary school:**

doing homework wrong and getting in detention because if it's hard for me now it'll be worse in high school

being asked questions in French because I can't answer them fluently

answering questions because I get nervous

I don't know

singing because you have to be able to read

tests because it is hard and everyone laughs at you if you're wrong

**Asked if they could choose any language to learn at secondary school which one would they choose and why:**

Spanish because my aunty speaks that language

I would choose Italian because I can take too many holidays in Italy. there really is Italian

I would choose to learn Dutch because I go there quite a lot  
French because it's the easiest language there is  
Spanish for some reason I'm fascinated with Spain  
French because it is a great language and I would like to go to France  
I would like to speak Arabic because my dad's Egyptian  
I'd like to speak Cypriot because I'd like to live there for a little  
That is a hard one I want to learn at least 5 languages when I finish high school. But to  
start of I will choose French, then German, Australian, Arabic and Somali or Spanish  
etc



## **APPENDIX G**

### **Comments from Year 7 Children with no previous French**

Enjoyable  
OK  
Good  
Great  
Interesting  
Challenging but fun  
Exciting but fun  
Very very good  
Fun and interesting  
Fun but hard  
Really exciting  
Very good for me  
Quite good to do  
An exciting challenge and experience  
Good because when I go to France not many people speak English  
Lovely and good I like  
Great fun  
Exciting  
Exciting and good  
Fun and good to learn  
Very exciting  
Fun and exciting  
Not good not bad just OK

[unconventional spellings were corrected]

**APPENDIX H**  
**Comments from Year 7 Children with some French**

OK  
Alright  
Fun  
Good fun  
Fun and exciting  
Ok but not excellent  
A very good thing for me  
Challenge and fun  
I enjoy French  
Interesting  
Good  
Helpful and fun  
Difficult but fun  
Good I enjoy it  
A good experience  
A good skill to pick up  
Very enjoyable  
Hard but fun and exciting  
Fun and easy  
Fun but may be boring  
Challenging  
A lovely idea  
Really good  
Excellent  
Brilliantly good fun  
Fun and Good  
Difficult and exciting  
Difficult  
Not that bad because it's interesting  
Difficult but I get through it  
Hard  
Didn't like it  
Teacher did not teach us anything  
Not sure  
Boring  
A waste of time  
I might get words wrong  
Rubbish, done it for a year and it's rubbish

[unconventional spellings were corrected]

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